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BALLET PANORAMA

*An Illustrated Chronicle
of Three Centuries*

By

ARNOLD L. HASKELL

*With 158 Illustrations
from Prints, Drawings and Photographs*

LONDON

B. T. BATSFORD LTD
15 NORTH AUDLEY STREET, W.1

First Published, April 1938

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
FOR THE PUBLISHERS, B. T. BATSFORD LTD., LONDON
TEXT BY UNWIN BROTHERS LTD., WOKING
PLATES BY THE DARIEN PRESS, EDINBURGH

To

THE LADY ST. JUST
MRS. OSWALD BIRLEY
MRS. KEITH NEWALL
***and* MRS. WALTER POLLEN**

*Those gracious ladies who have done
so much for Ballet*

By the Same Author

BALLETOMANIA

DIAGHILEFF

DANCING ROUND THE WORLD

PRELUDE TO BALLET

BALLETOMANE'S SCRAPBOOK, *Etc.*

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Acknowledgment

THE pictures reproduced have been carefully selected to illustrate the whole period of Ballet Panorama. A few, however, have been included for decorative purposes because they suggest an atmosphere. I would have liked them to have been placed in strictly chronological order, but the mechanics of book production have not always made this possible.

I must thank in particular Captain R. C. H. Jenkinson for allowing me to reproduce his Bakst drawing as a frontispiece, Mrs. J. S. Haskell for giving me access to prints in her collection, and Les Archives Internationales de la Danse, Paris, for the endless trouble they have taken in finding suitable illustrations from documentary sources, and in allowing me to use them. I would also like to thank Merlyn Severn and Gordon Anthony for permission to use their photographs in spite of the fact that they themselves are preparing books; Mr. John M. Phillips for his many very fine studies included by kind permission of the proprietors of *Life*; Colonel de Basil for permission to use certain photographs, G. Sevastianoff for procuring them, and René Blum for similar permission.

Finally I must thank Mr. Charles Fry for his invaluable help and advice, and the many hours he has spent with me over this book.

Demands of space have precluded mention of the name of each photographer on the plate itself, but I should like to place on record that figs. 68, 111, 117, 118, 121, 122, 125, 131, 132, 133, 140-146, 150 are the work of Gordon Anthony; figs. 107-109, of Battles, Barcelona; figs. 75, 77, of Cecil Beaton; fig. 93, of Brewster; figs. 127, 128, 135, of J. W. Debenham; figs. 96, 97, of Ruth Frank; fig. 101, of F. J. Gutman; fig. 139, of Harlip; fig. 112, of Lipnitzki, Paris; figs. 2, 3, 81, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 138, 158, and the endpapers, of John M. Phillips; fig. 134, of Houston Rogers; figs. 69, 74, 83, of Sasha; figs. 64, 86-92, 94, 98, 100, 136, 137, of Merlyn Severn; figs. 110, 113, 114, 116, 119, 120, 123, of Maurice Seymour, Chicago; fig. 76, of Karl Shenker; and figs. 66, 79, 84, 85, 149, 151, of Studio-Iris. Fig. 42 was kindly supplied by Mr. Cyril W. Beaumont; figs. 59, 61, by *The Home*, Sydney; figs. 65, 71, by Mr. A. W. King; fig. 152, by Radio Pictures; and figs. 154, 155, 156, by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The remaining subjects are mostly from my own collection.

ARNOLD L. HASSELL

London, 1938



2 Backstage : The Wardrobe Mistress adds the finishing touches



3 Backstage . Alexandra Danilova at the Rosin Box

Introduction

IT is not my object here to write a history of the dance, or to present any fresh material, but to give a sketch with a commentary and an interpretation. Each period has already been admirably dealt with by the many experts on the subject, to whom I am very much indebted, moreover a history by its very complexity of detail would lose sight of my sole intention which has been to write a narrative of the continuity of tradition, to show how and in what way the companies and the dancers that we applaud to-day have arisen out of the past, to show both the intention and the chance that has made them as they are.

A whole generation of *balletomanes* has grown up that started its enthusiasm with the grand manner of that fine dancer Danilova and the charming grace of Baronova, Toumanova and Riabouchinska. It must surely interest the enthusiast to know how his favourites have arisen, to trace stage by stage their artistic pedigrees. Ballet is essentially an art of tradition and we can better understand the performance of to-day by knowing what has gone before to make to-day's performance. Moreover, the tradition is strong, easily traced, continuous and unbroken by change of time or scene and its study, as the performances of yesterday waken into life, is infinitely fascinating.

For that reason I have tried wherever possible to rely on contemporary accounts, to make no statement for which I did not find some confirmation, but in a short study it is impossible not to be dogmatic at times.

I have also tried, difficult task for a confirmed and notorious

enthusiast, to keep myself as far out of the book as possible and I have not been concerned with criticism or the artistic merits of companies or individuals save where this fits into my scheme as influencing tradition. There are many great performers of the past, who enjoyed success in their day, whose names I have been forced to omit, because their influence did not seem to me great or direct enough for so simple a study.

In writing of the present I have also tried to be objective and to view it as a part of history, to put myself in the attitude of someone writing in the future.

This is a framework of the journey of ballet from the court of Louis XIV to the stage at Covent Garden during a Russian Ballet season, or the stage of our national treasure, Sadler's Wells. Into this account every reader should be able to fit his own very personal experiences, to admire his favoured *ballerina* the more because he knows Camargo.

ARNOLD L. HASKELL

LONDON 1938

PART ONE

The Birth and Progress of Ballet

“Il n’ya rien de si nécessaire aux hommes que la danse.”

Act I. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.* *Molière*

“Sur les dix heures du soir, le silence ayant été imposé, on ouit aussitôt derrière le Chateau une note de hautsboys, Cornets, Sacquebouttes, et autres doux instrumens de musique.”

Ballet Comique de la Reyne, Overture

(i) *The Ballet is in Town*

THE Ballet has come to town, London, Paris, New York, Sydney, but not with the traditional parade and the flourish of trumpets of that other great art of ancient tradition, the circus. Men, women, boys and girls clamber out of the train, are greeted by groups of friends and fervents and scatter through the town in search of lodgings. If it is London, their longest halting place, the hunt will be difficult, the lodgings bad. Later they will turn up at the theatre, scan the board for notice of rehearsal and, if by chance they are free, hasten to the nearest cinema.

But already the gallery queue is forming, real devotees of the art who brave every discomfort so keen is their enjoyment. Among them are a few cranks and busybodies, terror of all stage-doorkeepers, unhinged by what they see, quarrelsome and possessive where their favourites are concerned, elated by a smile, furious if they are ignored.

The bills are up. TO-NIGHT at 8.45—*LES SYLPHIDES*—*AURORA'S WEDDING*—*LA BOUTIQUE FANTASQUE*—or perhaps there is the name of some new venture awaiting public approval and that approval is vital, for unlike a play every ballet aims at a permanent place in the repertoire.

Ballet Parade front and back of the House, and how many realise, front or back, that this has been going on for centuries, in different countries under different civilisations with surprisingly little change in atmosphere. Ballet, last stronghold of theatrical illusion, has been a means of escape the world over.

(ii) “*Many before me have writ books on dancing*”

“Many before me have writ books on dancing,” wrote the poet Lucian.* He is having a heated argument with one Crato who has upbraided him for his too frequent visits to the ballet, saying that he can see no pleasure in “gazing at an effeminate fellow, with lascivious postures and ridiculous grimaces . . . and this to the noise of a foolish harp, all which with their frequent rehearsals and continued din of stamping and jumping, are truly ridiculous and unbecoming a man of your parts and education. You give me no hopes of your conversion, as long as you are disposed to command such vile and cursed filthy exercises.”

Lucian is indignant at this attack on a favourite pleasure and proceeds to annihilate Crato in an argument that is as modern as are Crato’s objections. He starts by telling him of the antiquity of the art.

“. . . for it was neither invented yesterday nor t’other day but deriv’d from our ancestors of a great distance: and they that have given the best reason when it began do affirm that it had its rise with the universal creation of all things, and

* Dryden’s translation.



4 At Practice : Pearl Argyle and Robert Helpmann



5 The Beginner : from an etching by Louis Legrand

equal even with *Love*, one of the ancientests of the Gods. For the frequent conjunctions of the fixt stars with the Planets, their close communion and constant harmony, are indisputable indications of this divine and ancient art."

He rebukes Crato for the mistake of condemning the art for the ignorance of the artist, for those dancers to whom "music means one thing and the feet follows another". Also "too much affectation is as great a vice in dancing as in eloquence". All of which might have been written and has been written many times over by the contemporary critic.

Dancing is "an art of various yet harmonious measure and which required much skill and experience. . . . This art is not easie, but which has a great Affinity with almost all sorts of Learning; as not only Musick but Arithmetic, Geometry and your Philosophy, Physics and Ethics, but the superfluous Ergos of Logick I must confess it has not much need of . . . but above all else he (the dancer) has need of a good memory".

He goes on then to talk of the universality of the art in time and space.

"Also 't was likely that the Phoenicians delighted very much in Dancing, being a People that abounded in Delicacy, and lived in all sorts of luxury, in Thessaly, also, this exercise was in great esteem; for the inhabitants borrowed the name of their magistrates from it* and called them *Those that lead the dance.*"

"No sacred thing," he goes on to say, "was transacted in Delos without Dancing and Musick."

"Homer reckons it amongst the most agreeable pleasures in nature, as Sleep, Love and Musick and gives it the title of Unblameable. . . ."

* To-day in savage New Guinea a synonym for a wise intelligent man is *a great dancer.*

"For these Swift Motions, nimble turnes, airy capers, brisk whirlings, supple somersets and such like rejoice those that see them and exercise those that do them."

By now Crato can hold out no longer, he is both ashamed and convinced and humbly begs Lucian not to keep those pleasures for himself, but to take him to share in "this sweet poison" on the very next occasion.

The gallery queue moves on, talking and arguing about the merits of this and that dancer through the strident rasping noise of a wheezy gramophone, property of an optimistic beggar. Occasionally it surges forward to see a favourite enter the stage-door, to seize her hand or beg a photograph. They have always been connoisseurs in the "Gods", jealous guardians of ballet tradition. Ballet as this advancing queue know it is but a part, a very small and recent development of dancing, a fact that is by no means as obvious as it should be to most young ballet dancers and most young *balletomanes*.

(iii) *Excursion through time*

It is idle for the layman to be dogmatic where the anthropologist can only speculate, but dancing may well have existed before developed speech and most certainly before complex music, the first of all rhythmic sounds being the stamping of hardened naked feet and the clapping of hands. I only hint at this far distant picture to make the position of ballet in the scheme of things clearer. Dancing is primitive, part of the very instinct of animals, the lyrebird dances deliberately to attract his mate, the brolga (native companion) holds his *corroborees*, word borrowed from great dancers, the most primitive of all savages, the Australian aboriginal. Every nation in every degree of civilisation has expressed itself in dancing and the

dance is more significant than speech or the printed word, for while man's writings can lie his movements cannot. The psychiatrist studies movement more than speech.

Movement fully as complex in design as contemporary ballet has long been part of the beautiful and symbolical ceremonial of the Christian church both Eastern and Western. Its esoteric significance may escape even the antiquary, the occultist alone without fear of contradiction is bold enough to claim to unveil it, but mysticism as well as animal instinct finds expression in the dance.

Dancing may have its origin as a spontaneous expression of sentiment, hate, blood lust, the joy of the hunt, hunger, love, but rapidly it becomes formalised and the ritual of the church and even the dances of savage tribes for set occasions are more traditional and unvarying than the movements of ballet, the modern dance form. Java, Bali, India, Spain, all have their special highly formalised development of the dance.

Ballet itself is but one of these, a branch that has for its object theatrical entertainment. It is applied dancing, dancing applied to the theatre, a system with rules as set as musical notation. "Ballet is an art because it has rules," said Voltaire, a staunch *balletomane*. It may be considered a highly artificial form of dancing, and, of course, it is, for the whole theatre is artificial, a convention, but no more so than the majority of forms of dancing that have their origin in religious ceremonial, and it allows a far greater freedom of expression and individuality than any of these. The box-office is not the most jealous of all gods.

In order to understand ballet it is first of all essential to see it as part of a whole scheme.

Dance improvisation with no technical basis may be temporarily interesting in itself so long as the performer is interesting as a personality, but it cannot survive through

being handed on and cannot interest us here since it has no rules as an art to be studied.

We start with the facts that ballet is one of the many systems that have sprung up from the natural desire to be articulate in movement, that it is artificial, a part of the theatre, that it has a fixed technical basis, that it is complex, composed of the ordered movements of a whole group, that it is not an independent art, but made up of dancing, music and the plastic arts.

Its history which I will outline roughly and briefly will give us a greater understanding of its nature, and its history is very closely associated with the social history of its times from the period that dancing for stage and dancing for pleasure became sharply differentiated, the second remaining on the village green and lingering on at the court of Kings, the first becoming the definite profession and the branch of art in which we are interested to-day.

A true history of dancing as distinct from ballet would be one aspect of world history, social and ethical, a book in very many volumes that some anthropologist should tackle. In that book ballet itself would occupy but a very small space.

Ballet comes from the court of pleasure-loving Kings via the village green of pleasure-loving yokels on to the stage of hard-working professionals. The story begins with natural high spirits, proceeds through vanity, the identification of the monarch and his courtiers with the deities and heroes of mythology and ends up in virtuosity that the amateur could no longer attempt. When the spontaneity fades the art begins and a semblance of that spontaneity becomes an indispensable part of the artist's equipment. In other countries and at other times this selfsame cycle has been traversed. Danced and mimed entertainment comes from Greece, where it was highly developed, to Rome. In ancient Rome the people dance, the

Emperor himself dances and there are professionals so efficient that a Barbarian prince allied to Rome asks for the loan of one that by his mimicry he can act as ambassador and make the barbarian tribes understand the universal meaning of his gestures.

The story of our particular art starts at the court in France. Classical dancing differs as we shall see from the national dancing out of which it was born through the fact of its being able to be transplanted from country to country, gaining something from every change of scene. Folk dancing is the *petit vin du pays*, ballet the *grand cru*. We shall see how it came to be transplanted, often by purely extraneous happenings and how it is being transplanted before our eyes to-day, as we wait in the queue to enter the theatre in Rosebery Avenue, its English home to-day.* If I do not on every occasion point the parallel between past and present or underline the continuity of tradition, it is because that is evident. Through the years a form of the dance, diversion of Emperors and Kings travels from Greece and Rome of the ancients to Italy and from there to the French court to become ballet as we know it.

(iv) *Ballet at Court*

In the sixteenth century under the influence of Italy† ballet was a commonplace in court circles, closely linked with every

* That fact would be more rapidly realised if people understood how near the West End was Sadler's Wells, five minutes further than Covent Garden, a twopenny bus ride from Piccadilly—19 or 38 bus stopping at the door. This may seem a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, but it is more ridiculous not to know the way to Sadler's Wells.—A. L. H.

† "Il en est l'inventeur, nous suivons ses leçons
Comme ses vestemens, ses mœurs et ses façons
Tant l'ardeur des François aime la chose estrange."

Ronsard.

festive occasion, betrothals, weddings, victories, the reception of foreign ambassadors. Nobles vied with one another to produce spectacles of lavish brilliance, spending a fortune on the evening's entertainment, as jealous of their success as the impresarios of our day. The subjects chosen* were from those mentioned by Lucian in his dialogue—a direct link with the earliest period of the art—or often from actual political happenings, where an allegory would thinly disguise a lesson in statecraft. Both Richelieu and Mazarin made use of the ballet for political purposes and the last ballet of Louis XIII, 1641, *Ballet de la Prospérité des Armes de La France* was prefaced by a special decree from Mazarin explaining its exact political significance.

The dancers in these ballets included the biggest names in France; Kings, courtiers, generals, ambassadors.

The true importer of ballet into France was Catherine de Medici,† who was pleased to keep her royal sons occupied while she ruled, and the first memorable work *Le Ballet Comique de la Reyné*, 1581, composed by Baltasarini, an Italian known in France as de Baltasar de Beaujoyeux and produced on the occasion of the betrothal of Marguerite de Lorraine to the Duc de Joyeuse. A full account of this ballet exists in a contemporary work, the first ballet to be recorded in detail.

The very title *ballet comique*, to us a commonplace, marks a very great invention, the alliance of ballet and comedy, the first conception of dance drama. Formerly ballet had been

* It is interesting in view of the success of *Checkmate*, the chess ballet at Sadler's Wells, 1937, to note that in 1607 a game of chess was actually played as a ballet.—A. L. H.

† Catherine de Medici (wife of Henri II), 1528–1589. Francis II, 1559–1560. Charles IX, 1560–1574. Henri III, 1574–1589. Henri IV, 1589–1610. Marie de Medici's regency, 1610–1628. Louis XIII, 1628–1661. Louis XIV, 1661–1715. Louis XV, 1715–1774.

defined as *des meslanges géométriques de plusieurs personnes dansant ensemble sous une diverse harmonie de plusieurs instruments.*

This ballet tells the story of Circe and is called a comedy "more because of the beautiful, calm and happy ending than on account of the characters who are nearly all gods and goddesses or other heroic beings". The choreographer is pleased with his invention and goes on to say—"I can say that I have united in a well proportioned body, the eye, the ear and the understanding." The court poets understood the importance of this first dramatic ballet.

"Beaujoyex, qui premier des cendres de la Grèce,
Fais retourner au jour le dessein et l'adresse
du Balet compassé en son tour mesuré. . . ."

writes Billard, and another poet says:

"Tu as, à la façon des Perses
Ce Balet nouveau inventé."

The work was a collaboration of the finest talent available under the supervision of the choreographer, and a fortune was spent on it to show how sumptuously France could do such things. From the reign of Henri III until the founding of the Académie the Ballet de la Cour in France took the place of the Opera in Italy and the Mask in England.

Francis II, Charles IX and Henri III were all dancers and Henri IV had his son Louis XIII taught dancing from a very tender age. Bassompierre, the great marshal, enemy of Richelieu, was such an enthusiastic dancer that he even worded a battle dispatch in terms of the dance. "The dancers are ready; we must now begin the ballet."

Under Louis XIV, *le roy soleil*, ballet spectacles became still more lavish and his majesty and power were a favourite theme for sycophant courtier choreographers. Ménestrier mounted a

ballet in which the thirteen Louis paid homage to the glorious fourteenth. Where in the previous reign ballet had a tendency to be bawdy and Louis XIII himself specialising in low comedy roles, appeared more than once with great success as an old woman, Louis XIV loved the lavish and the heroic. Louis enjoyed the collaboration of Lully, the foremost dancer and musician of his day, of Beauchamp and of Molière himself, who devised themes and supervised production. From that collaboration ballet became truly indigenous in France, striking deep roots from the Italian seed.

The King's growing corpulence decided him at the age of thirty to abandon the dance and gradually at Beauchamp's insistence professional dancers were allowed to take part. Hitherto professional dancers were in fact tumblers and acrobats who travelled from fair to fair, but they soon acquired the style of the court ballet and enlarged its scope by their suppleness and whole-time devotion to the work. At this time dancing was almost exclusively a masculine pastime, many feminine roles even being assumed by men. It was only twenty years after the foundation of the Academy that women began to play a role, appropriately enough in Lully's *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* in which Mlle de Poitiers and Madame de Sévigné appeared. The long skirts of the women prevented any attempt at complexity of step and the choreography consisted of a series of geometrical patterns. Elevation had yet to be born and at the beginning of the seventeenth century the five positions, basis of the classical dance, did not yet exist, coming in gradually under Italian influence. Camargo knew the beginnings of the *entrechat*, but these were not fluent till the time of Lamy in 1710, the *pirouette* was introduced by Heinel in 1776 and perfected by Gardel and Vestris. But with the shortening of the costume the acquirement of technique proceeds rapidly, especially with the invention of tights by M. Maillot. The

ballet was not yet divorced from the spoken word and was usually accompanied by a book of verses, opera in fact, with danced interludes.

It was the Duchesse du Maine in 1708 who separated words and dance in an entertainment given in her private theatre at Sceaux, the subject being drawn from Corneille's *Horace*.

In 1661 the establishment of *L'Académie Nationale de la Danse* ushered in a new period. What was a pleasure became an art with definite standards for all time, the court and the stage were separated and we begin the period of ballet as we know it.

Under Pécour, Beauchamp's successor, dancing underwent a rapid technical development. It was enriched by the importation of *contre danses* from England, and many of the steps that form the basis of our technique to-day began their existence then. We have a very precise knowledge of the dance of those times through the orcheso-stenographie of Feuillet, who recorded their pattern and movement in a system of script.

(v) *Birth of the Ballerina*

In 1721 La Camargo, the first great *ballerina* made her appearance, extended the repertoire of movement and so excelled that it became impossible for the merely graceful amateur to compete any longer. The history of costume has always gone hand in hand with the development of the dance. La Camargo had shapely legs which she wished to reveal. She shortened her skirt but a few inches—scandalised some—and the added liberty gave rise to the birth of virtuosity. We can see the extent of the shortened skirt in Lancret's famous picture. She also inaugurated the heelless shoe and used more of her foot than had been done since the days of Greece and Rome. Sallé, her greatest rival, was the first to wear a Greek tunic as Galatea

in the ballet *Pygmalion* performed at Covent Garden. Since Paris was not ready for the innovation Sallé was not merely a dancer but a reformer who thought out the problems of ballet.

The rivalry of these two which gave rise to Voltaire's charmingly tactful verses played its part in the popularity of the new art just as later rivalries in Russia and elsewhere extended the circle of *balletomanes* by giving them a constant topic for heated discussion, making them eager to find new converts to worship at the shrine of their ideal. The whole history of ballet contains such examples of rivalry: Camargo, Sallé; Taglioni, Elssler; Kchesinska, Legnani and other members of that great period; in our own day Toumanova, Baronova. They add a competitive element to the pleasures of ballet, feed the hero-worship instinct in a fast-growing public eager for escape from the realities of life. Also, they spur on each dancer to give of her very best. The popularity of the cinema has been consciously built up on rivalry and this necessity for hero-worship. The stars created by astute financiers are the saints of a new religion. In ballet it is the public since the days of Camargo and Sallé who have fostered it while the managers on the contrary have in recent times fought it tooth and nail, preferring to base their faith on an ensemble rather than on individuals, who may fall ill inopportunely or demand too much.

The public as always is certain to win.

(vi) *Noverre: The Shakespeare of the Dance*

In this breakneck race through the centuries and the face of Europe it is necessary to pause for a while to consider one of the very biggest figures the dance has produced, a pioneer and still to-day a major influence in ballet. His written works

tackle all the major problems of the contemporary ballet and are excitingly modern in their content and point of view.*

Just as La Camargo developed the mechanics of the dance giving to the choreographer a new and more complex instrument that would allow him to experiment in more than pattern, J. G. Noverre, her contemporary, developed and extended the aesthetic of ballet,† both in practice and in the printed word, his published letters are still the choreographer's bible.

He was born in Paris 1727, the son of a distinguished Swiss soldier, *aide-de-camp* to Charles XII, and was destined for a military career. But from an early age he was enamoured of the theatre and his father apprenticed him to the great Dupré, successor to Pécour. He made his debut at Fontainebleau at the age of sixteen before Louis XV but met with such poor success that he left for Potsdam where he soon became a firm favourite with Frederick the Great. However, Frederick did not pay his favourites any too well and he returned to France where he produced his *Ballet Chinois* with décors by François Boucher. This was an outstanding success though later he himself was not proud of this *chinoiserie*. On the strength of it Garrick hailed him to London and there is no doubt that the great actor influenced his art and turned his direction to an increased development of mime. The admiration was mutual for Garrick called him nothing less than *The Shakespeare of the Dance*. Unfortunately for Noverre his London appearance coincided with the outbreak of war between the two countries, his reception was hostile to the point of endangering his life

* See Appendix I.

† The healthy shock produced by his work is shown by a contemporary letter:

"Noverre a mis en scène La Mort D'Agamemnon. C'est un ballet architrifique. La première soirée il a fait rire et on a sifflé. Hier au soir on a prêté quelque attention. Nous verrons la suite."

and the scenery was smashed by the infuriated public. Back in France his great success inspired jealousy (another respect in which the world of ballet remains unaltered), and he himself was of a choleric disposition, sometimes spitting at his dancers in the violence of his passion. "Noverre est impétueux et orgueilleux jusqu'à la brutalité." His whole life was in a sense a tragedy, for while his influence was accepted in Paris his person was rarely acceptable and the prize was constantly eluding him. After various wanderings he settled down for a time as *maître de ballet* at Stuttgart under the protection of the art-loving Duke of Würtemberg, and Stuttgart became the important centre of ballet where Vestris danced and Heinl, the idol of her day, flourished and enriched the dance by her technical prowess. At Stuttgart the pantomime ballet as apart from the opera ballet was truly developed.

His letters published in 1760 caused a sensation. Voltaire hailed them as a work of genius, saying "Poets and Painters shall dispute the honour to have you ranked with them". But in spite of this Noverre's wanderings continued. During half a century he covered Europe; Paris again, Vienna, Milan, Naples, Lisbon. There is no clear record by which we can trace them all. Finally through the intervention of Marie Antoinette his cherished goal seemed in sight. She offered to make him *maître de ballet en chef* in succession to Vestris, and in place of Gardel or Dauberval who expected and were entitled to the succession. For three years they fought him tooth and nail and finally when a compromise was reached the revolution broke out, sending him to London. Noverre died at the age of eighty-two, his misfortunes having spread his ideas in every civilised capital.

At the time of his arrival ballet, an infant art, had already been fixed in a groove for close on half a century. The mechanics of dancing had interested *maîtres de ballet* at the



6 Beauchamp



7 Gaetano Vestris



8 J. G. Noverre



9 Carlo Blasis

Fathers of the Ballet



expense of the art, a very natural happening when the machine was still so new.

The account of the Great Dutch philologist, Isaac Vossius, *De Docmatum cantu et viribus Rhytmi*, published at Oxford in 1673, is interesting in this connection.

“In Europe a great deal is spent on dancing shows, but if we exempt their pomp and the jewels worn by the dancers one can find scarcely any charm. . . . One can only find movements not devoid of harmony, but lacking all significance. Where could one find to-day a dancer or a mime capable of expressing himself by his attitudes as does an orator by his words. . . .”

This is not only interesting as evidence for the light it shows on pre-Noverre dancing, but also in revealing the type of man who was seriously interested in analysing ballet critically.

Saint Mard in his *Réflexions sur l'Opéra* written in 1741, when Noverre was still a child confirms this.

“Would it be so difficult to put more fire and invention into the dances? I do not say that our dancers should become entirely pantomimists, that would be going too far, but would there be any harm if they were a little?”

He accuses the dances of lacking both variety and intelligence and the dancers themselves as “being of cardboard which are made to move like machines”.

All of which was resaid in 1900 by the supporters of Fokine in Russia when Noverre had been temporarily forgotten. It will be seen that there was a major conflict that has a very modern ring between dancing pure for the sake of movement and dancing with pantomime that told a story and expressed an idea. Saint Mard also said that pantomime is addressed to the heart, dancing to the eyes alone. The same type of argument has been pursued in poetry with the value of words as musical sounds alone and as vehicles for meaning. The *Entrée*

seuls which had enjoyed popularity since the time of Louis XIII were a type of *divertissement* which one might compare to *Aurora's Wedding*, the abbreviated version of *The Sleeping Princess* that is one of the most popular ballets of our time. Noverre postulated that the *divertissement* must give way to the ballet, a unity with mimed dramatic content.

Fokine had very much the same problem to face and in my belief solved it by laying down that mime cannot exist without dancing. This was no compromise when properly understood. A Fokine ballet is entirely dancing, *recitative* dancing and *aria* dancing, to use an opera parallel. Previously the miming had become a formula that held up the action and that was in fact a period of padding that merely introduced each dance. We can still see it in *Giselle* and the full version of *The Swan Lake* both of which are preserved at Sadler's Wells. We saw it underlined in the skating "ballets" at Covent Garden.* Curiously enough with two recent Fokine ballets the controversy has started all over again, in each case unjustifiably. In Gluck's *Don Juan* he was giving a deliberate pastiche of the *ballet d'action* of the period, while *Le Coq d'Or* was a story told purely in dancing and requiring for its dramatic coherence a certain amount of *recitative*, none of which, save the Astrologer's movements before the curtain, can be considered as superfluous. Yet a strong section of opinion held that the ballet did not contain enough pure dancing, reverting to the Noverre controversy and to a view that Noverre certainly did not hold. Perhaps, one may attribute such a view to the popularity of *Aurora's Wedding* and of the abstract symphonic ballet *Choreartium*, though this is by no means "dancing for the sake of dancing" but for the sake of paralleling the musical content. Noverre also fulminated against the use of masks and cumbersome head-dresses, which

* See Appendix.

made mime an impossibility. In spite of this the actual change came about by accident, or so we are led to believe. Vestris was prevented from taking a certain role and Gardel, the only one able to deputise and always a rebel against the mask, made it a condition that he should do so maskless. This innovation was so great a success that Noverre's wish ultimately triumphed.

The perfect combination of naturalism and dance was postulated by Charles Batteux in an important treatise published in 1746.

"All music and all dancing must have a meaning . . . it is for poetry, music and dancing to reveal to us human actions and emotions. For as all art the real dance must be an imitation."

This is more fully developed by a paragraph from Fokine's letter to the London *Times* July 6th, 1914.

"The dance form shall be composed in a manner corresponding to the subject . . . dancing and mime shall be employed only in expression of the theme, and not as a mere *visual entertainment*" (cf. also with Saint Mard's "dancing addressed to the eyes alone").

Noverre in a limited sense despised technique or rather its dominion, but he insisted on the turned-out positions that give the maximum advantage in execution and that are the basis of all ballet technique. This seems to have been recognised at the time, for a contemporary writer praises Camargo at the expense of Prévost "who had not like her the feet, knees and hips so turned out".

His lessons have been forgotten during whole lean periods, but they have always been there to recall the dancer to the paths of art.

I will paraphrase certain portions of the letters that apply particularly to our times.

Maîtres de ballet should consult the works of great painters . . . they will avoid in this way as often as possible that symmetry of figures that means in fact a repetition of identical pictures on the same canvas.

This symmetry in choreography was the first thing that the Diaghileff group revolted against. In 1933 Leonide Massine said to the author in an interview, "Ballet is only three hundred years old, while in the museums of the world there are centuries of plastic genius to draw upon." The old and the modern choreographer both invoke paintings in their search for interesting compositions.

Noverre is careful to explain that he is not preaching disorder, on the contrary he wishes for "an ordered disorder".

The maître de ballet must rehearse a dramatic scene until the dancers have reached the moment when it becomes natural.

Said Karsavina in a conversation with the author: "The dancer can only express herself when technique becomes second nature."

This is an artificial return to the days when dancing was a spontaneous expression of the emotions. It serves to put technique in its place, as something to be learned and then ignored both by the dancer and his public. The terms "a technical dancer" used alone are the very contrary to praise, they imply a lack of expressiveness.

There are a number of things that cannot be rendered intelligible through gesture.

The choice of subject is all-important. Fokine has always affirmed that the ballet in which the spectator must refer to his programme for guidance is a failure. This means that ballet in one sense is more limited than the drama but in another

much more comprehensive and universal. Look for instance at the multiplicity of meanings that can be given to *Petrouchka* or the complete character sketch of adolescence in the fourteen minutes of *Le Spectre de la Rose*. The modern ballet is admirable in this respect, such sophisticated works as *Cotillon*, *Jeux d'Enfants*, *Wedding Bouquet*, *Nocturne* are logical as ballets and cannot be explained on paper. They are true to their medium, and even the ballets like *Checkmate* that are capable of a logical explanation mean much more than the printed words in the programme. It is a test of a successful ballet that this should be the case. Pure plot too involved for explanation is wrong. *Giselle*, unlike the other romantic period ballets, remains with us because its literary plot is simple, while its meaning is far deeper.

Steps, self-confidence, speed, lightness, precision, etc., that is what I call the mechanism of the dance. When all these elements are not guided by the intelligence I applaud and admire the man-machine but I am not moved.

How many dancers, applauded by the public for their prowess, find no place in the history of ballet tradition, inspired no writer to save them from oblivion!

“Personality is allied to the mind. When a dancer’s mind is working with her body she shows personality,” said Ninette de Valois, the deepest thinker in contemporary ballet, in an interview with the author.

I think I have given sufficient indication of the wealth to be found in Noverre’s letters in the very few samples I have been able to draw from his coherent and connected arguments. An entire modern commentary could be written on a work that is indispensable both for the dancer and the intelligent spectator.

(vii) *Vestris, "Le Diou de la danse," Heinel, La Guimard and other founders of tradition*

It is not possible or necessary for my purpose of constructing a complete map of the modern scene to name every rivulet that flows into the main stream. Every dancer of reputation has added to its strength. However, it is necessary to pause at certain names whose contribution is both positive and unmistakable.

Gaetano Vestris was a contemporary of Noverre, and his collaborator in the sense that he was able to translate so many of his dreams into reality and to extend the male technique of the dance, adding to it for future generations. Noverre said of him, "Vestris is the best or in fact the only serious dancer in the theatre . . . he adds to the most noble and effortless execution the rare merit of touching, interesting and speaking to the emotions."

This founder of a dancing dynasty was born in 1729 in Florence. The family settled in Paris where he became a pupil of Dupré, the pupil of Pécour, the pupil of Beauchamp. He entered the *Académie* in 1748, remaining there in various capacities until 1776. During the final years when he no longer danced he turned choreographer. But he was never a theoretician or a man of learning, but just a dancer who served his art by his example. Many are the stories of the colossal conceit of *Le Diou de la danse*, as he styled himself, reminder of his Italian origins. There were but three great men he recognised . . . "myself, Voltaire and Frederick the Great." On one occasion when a woman apologised for having stood on his toe he replied, "Madame you have not hurt **ME**, you have put Paris into mourning for a fortnight."

Vestris was not merely a great individual performer but the founder of a royal family of the dance. He lived to see his son

Auguste hailed as *Le Diou de la danse* and his grandson Auguste Armand, if he did not reach godship served a useful career.

Under Noverre at Stuttgart he was associated in one of the most fruitful partnerships ever known with Dauberval and with Heinel his legal wife, whom I have already mentioned as the inventor of the *pirouette*.

Heinel was born in Bayreuth 1753 and made a sensational Paris débüt in 1768. "Par sa manière, noble, majestueuse," said a contemporary, "on croyait voir Vestris danser en femme." It was still the age of undoubted male supremacy.

The description given by a less well-disposed contemporary, Mlle Duthé of the Opéra is both interesting and amusing.

"Heinel, German by birth, was a fine man in the garments of my sex; that is the effect she always produced on me. Colossal in build, *une taille à l'avenant*, feet and hands which confirmed the rest, an admirable skin, firm and white, a fine face but with big features, and eyes like *portes-cochère*, so big were they. They were admired. . . . Her small mouth seemed to me to contrast ridiculously with the whole. . . . It was the fashion to enthuse about her person, her dance, her charms. All that did not please me, but then men have such strange tastes."

The feline Duthé goes on to retail some scandal.

"Le comte de Lauraguais fell in love with this kind of mountain and public opinion said that to win her favours he began by sending her 30,000 livres in a mother of pearl and gold casket. To this was added a simple present of 20,000 livres to her favourite brother."

This lavish present may have had something to do with the tone of Mlle Duthé's opinion of one who from all accounts was a very great dancer, especially as Duthé herself, first friend of the future Charles X, was an expert and notorious gold-digger who ruined many an English noble.

All that seems to survive of a great dancer are these accounts, malicious and otherwise, and the legends of her private life. Camargo, Heinel, Guimard, Vestris, Nijinsky, Duncan are known to thousands who have no interest in the dance itself, and new stories grow up around the last two almost daily. But in fact something very much more than a memory survives. If they were truly great, they left behind them an active tradition that makes the performance of ballet after them different. Heinel's *pirouettes* are a precious inheritance and there would certainly have been no Nijinsky without Vestris, no Pavlova without Taglioni.

The greatest dancer of all this period, one whose position was even more unrivalled than Taglioni's later, was Madeleine Guimard, *La Guimard*. "Parmi les déesses de cette mythologie moderne, celle sans contredit la plus célèbre," said the same Duthé who had so destroyed poor Heinel, and she continues, "Guimard who had so many friends and so many enemies that without a doubt she must have had great merit."

Madeleine Guimard was born in 1743 and from the moment of her *début* in 1762 as Terpsichore in the ballet *Les Caractères de la Danse* held a supremacy that was to last for thirty years and a fame that carried her through the French revolution and into a new age. Her adventures off the stage, the names of her protectors, the most famous of whom was Le Prince de Soubise, have made her into a legend and Edmond de Goncourt has written an extraordinarily interesting biography of her. The closing scenes of her life are especially vivid and memorable with the old dancer going through her early successes for the amusement of her friends, dancing them with her fingers in a specially made toy theatre. . . . "La vieille Guimard, repassant ses triomphes d'autrefois, oublieuse de l'heure."

Her position artistically, while it has been overshadowed



12, 13 Two contemporary engravings of La Guimard



14 Camargo and Sallé



16 Camargo



15 Camargo and Vestris

by the glamour of her name, was unassailable. Noverre gives her the seal of his approval in the phrase "Her dance had a noble simplicity", and there is an interesting account of her that rings true, even if it does come from the partial pen of a husband, the dancer and poet Despréaux. It is also most revealing of the aesthetic of the time.

"The dance to-day no longer resembles what I have seen in the past . . . the talent of the dancer does not reside in being able to execute all sorts of steps in time to some rhythm or other, the last walker on can do that; speed is no great advantage . . . grace of form is given by nature, grace of attitude lies in the choice of positions of the body that are taught and selected by good taste; grace of movement is not only to go from one attitude into another, but it imposes expression in accordance with the character to be interpreted, especially in *terre à terre* dancing, which is so different from *la grace sautée* . . .

"It is with *terre à terre* dancing that Mlle Guimard has charmed connoisseurs for more than 25 years. She was always new, *I do not speak only of her feet*, they are nothing in comparison with the charm of her body and head. She was a perfect comedienne . . . her expressive face easily depicted all the sensations *she felt or was meant to feel*."*

This is not only interesting as being a contemporary description of the greatest dancer of her age, it bears an analysis on its own merits for several reasons.

It makes clear the difference between a *terre à terre* dancer and a dancer of elevation, a difference that still exists. And since at the time when Despréaux was writing ballet was sufficiently close to La Camargo for the attention to be centred on elevation as an exciting novelty in itself grace

* *The Mercure de France* called La Guimard, "this charming actress-dancer who by her art is always what she wants to be."

and expressiveness had suffered. It is quite clear that Voltaire in his famous complimentary verses to Camargo and Sallé understood the difference and sought to underline it (the italics here are mine):

“Ah, Camargo, que vous êtes *brillante*,
 Mais que Sallé, grands dieux est *ravissante*,
 Que vos pas sont *légers*, et que les siens sont *doux*.
 Elle et inimitable et vous toujours nouvelle.
 Les nymphes *sautent* comme vous
 Et les graces *dansent* comme elle.”

Sallé represents the *terre à terre*, Camargo the dancer of elevation.*

Another significant phrase of Despréaux's is *I do not speak only of her feet*. Gradually dancing had become to be thought of solely in connection with the feet, a very natural outcome of the shortening of the skirt. While thinkers then understood that the whole body had to be harmonious and expressive this was subsequently forgotten for a very long period, only being taken for granted with the emergence of such extra-

* Some verses under engravings of the Lancret portraits gives a further picture of the rivals.

SALLÉ

Maitresses de cet Art que guide l'Harmonie,
 Je peins les Passions, j'exprime la gaieté,
 Je joins des Pas brillants au jeu de mon Génie
 Les Graces, la justesse, à la légerté
 Sans offenser l'aimable Modestie
 Qui de mon Sexe augmente la Beauté.

CAMARGO

Fidèle au loix de la Cadence
 Je forme au gré de l'art, les pas les plus hardis
 Originale dans ma danse
 Je puis le disputer au Balons, aux Blondis.

(At the present day Tatiana Riabouchinska is essentially a dancer of elevation.)

ordinary dancers as Taglioni and her peers, then forgotten again until Zucchi stood out as a remarkably expressive mime. There have been from the earliest times singularly few new theories of the dance, merely at certain periods rediscoveries of the truth uttered by a few great masters.

Finally the phrase *she felt* or *was meant to feel* is interesting from the point of view of acting in general, anticipating Coquelin's famous advice of feeling the emotion once, observing oneself and then repeating it at subsequent performances. Despréaux rightly considers dancing from a dramatic point of view.

It is obvious that dancing in the past has suffered through being assigned to no definite critic or rather through being considered as a subordinate interest of the musical critic. It is not music but applied music and in some senses is far nearer to the province of the dramatic critic, as all the utterances of the great *maîtres de ballet* prove. To-day when ballet is once more as popular as it has ever been the majority of the music critics have become knowledgeable in ballet and there are definite standards of criticism, but even so ballet suffers at times from being considered from the purist viewpoint of the concert hall rather than from the stage.

To return to La Guimard who has inspired these remarks: it is interesting to see the amount of interest that could centre round a dancer then.

For a time La Guimard suffered an agony of jealousy through the rivalry of La Dervieux, a singer turned dancer with success just about the time that La Guimard tried to sing in opera with no success. The rivalry which was one of success in love and beauty as well was made all the keener by the fact that Dorat, her very own pet poetaster, dared to sing the rival's praises in verse.

After an exchange of bitter repartee the following lampoon

appeared from La Dervieux's camp, hitting on the unfortunate truth of Guimard's then unfashionable thinness. Sophie Arnould had already called her *Le Squelette des Graces* in an unfortunate compliment.★

“Guimard en tout n'est qu'un artifice
 Et par dedans et par dehors.
 Otez-lui le fard et le vice
 Elle n'a plus d'âme, ni corps.
 Elle a la taille d'un fuseau,
 Les osse plus pointus qu'une squelette,
 Le teint couleur du noisette.”

The lampoon continues in a manner so scurrilous as to be no longer amusing. Guimard undoubtedly inspired the attack by the bitter yet more restrained verses of a vassal poet,

“Monotone et sans grand talent,
 Ses pas ne sont que des grimaces,
 Qu'un admirateur ignorant
 Prend pour d'inimitables graces.”

Fortunately to-day jealousy is no longer carried to such lengths, but then the rivalry of *ballerinas* is no longer front-page news.

(viii) *In Italy: Vigano and Blasis*

The centre of ballet activity continually changes its scene, from Italy to France, now back to Italy, then from France and Italy to Russia and from Russia over the globe.

Ballet does not die out in each country, suddenly to reappear elsewhere, but some political happening, some great new figure causes a change of scene, so gradual at first that the

* Sophie Arnould made another much repeated comparison, saying that Guimard dancing between Vestris and Dauberval, who looked at her lovingly, reminded her of two dogs looking at a bone.

contemporary scarcely realises what is happening. For the purposes of such a sketch as this it is necessary to travel rapidly from scene to scene, creating an illusion of abruptness that does not exist. To-day ballet activity is centring for the first time in London, yet so gradually that it will be difficult to trace.

A diagram will make the evolution clearer. (Diagram overleaf.)

The French revolution marked a halt in the progress of ballet in Paris. The ballet was branded as a court institution and the people themselves were dancing feverishly even during the terror in the streets and the innumerable dance halls that had sprung up; eighteen hundred of them within a few months.

Many French dancers such as Lise Noblet and her partner, M. Albert, well known to us in lithographs, found their way to London and started the popularity of ballet that reached great heights in the early and middle nineteenth century.

But it was in Italy that the ballet began to take on a new importance, quite apart from the tragic happenings in France.

Salvatore Vigano, 1769-1821, an Italian and nephew of Boccherini, was a pupil of Dauberval and through him came into contact with Noverre's ideals. (Everywhere in this story will we encounter the name of Noverre.) In 1812 Vigano established himself in Milan as a choreographer, developing the *corps de ballet* in particular, in the modern sense of the word, as an ensemble of individuals. He was a man of considerable culture who at times composed the music for his own ballets. Stendhal thought so highly of these choreographic dramas that he confessed that he preferred them to Shakespeare. The success of these and the influx of French dancers turned the Italian mind once more from the song to the dance.

Now appears the man who was to influence the dance even more profoundly than Noverre had done and who shares

ACADEMIE OF LOUIS XIV

*France supreme; 1661 until the Revolution,
with a revival during the Romantic Period*

NOVERRE at Stuttgart

*A Centre of Influence
for a Time*

VIGANO and BLASIS at

Milan Academy. 1812 onwards

DIDELOT in Russia.

*Russia supreme Centre of Influence
from mid-XIXth Century until
departure of Diaghileff,
Fokine, Pavlova.*

PERIOD OF GREATEST INFLUENCE OF
AMBULANT COMPANIES BEGINS WITH XXth CENTURY

PAVLOVA
1910-1931

DIAGHILEFF
1909-1929

DE BASIL
1932

U.S.A.
1933

ENGLAND
1931

WARSAW
1937

*A Return to
Permanent Domiciles
though not State
supported Institutions*

American Ballet	Camargo Society Ballet Club	Polish Ballet (partly subsidised)
Metropolitan	Sadler's Wells	
Philadelphia Ballet		

See also in this connection chart on page 33.

with Noverre and Fokine the position of creator of the modern ballet.

Carlo Blasis was born of noble descent in Naples, 1803. His father a musician gave him a liberal education in all the arts and he studied dancing under Gardel and Dauberval, a direct link with Noverre. When he was seventeen he published his first important book on dancing, *A Theoretical, Practical and Elementary Treatise on the Art of Dancing*. This paid handsome tribute to Noverre; "the excellent letters of this celebrated artist on the ballet should never be out of the composer's hands", but indicates the advances that have been made, "only the mechanical part is out of date for our art has entirely altered since he wrote". Even so in his Manual published ten years later he takes many of his technical views, textually from Noverre. In 1837 Carlo Blasis became director of the Academy of Dancing in Milan and rapidly made it into the very centre of ballet activity. Blasis was able to produce a ballet in its entirety, theme, music, choreography, décor. He was a frequent visitor to London and his important *Code of Terpsichore* was first published in England.

Blasis codified what was known by tradition, all that had grown up from 1661 to his day. He did far more than that. He selected, discarded and improved, explaining geometrically the basis of ballet technique in a manner so lucid that it has yet to be bettered. His best-known innovation was the *attitude* taken from Gian Bologna's Mercury. He was a keen student of sculpture in the studios of Canova and Thorvaldsen, an anatomical as well as a geometrical expert. He brought to his work an extraordinarily wide view. He was a poet, author of works on singing, music, and even politics, a biographer and encyclopaedist. A contemporary called him a "universal genius".

All those who have powerfully influenced the dance have

known far more than dancing, and this is a point that must be taken into consideration when we are estimating the present generation and trying to assess it as a part of the main tradition.

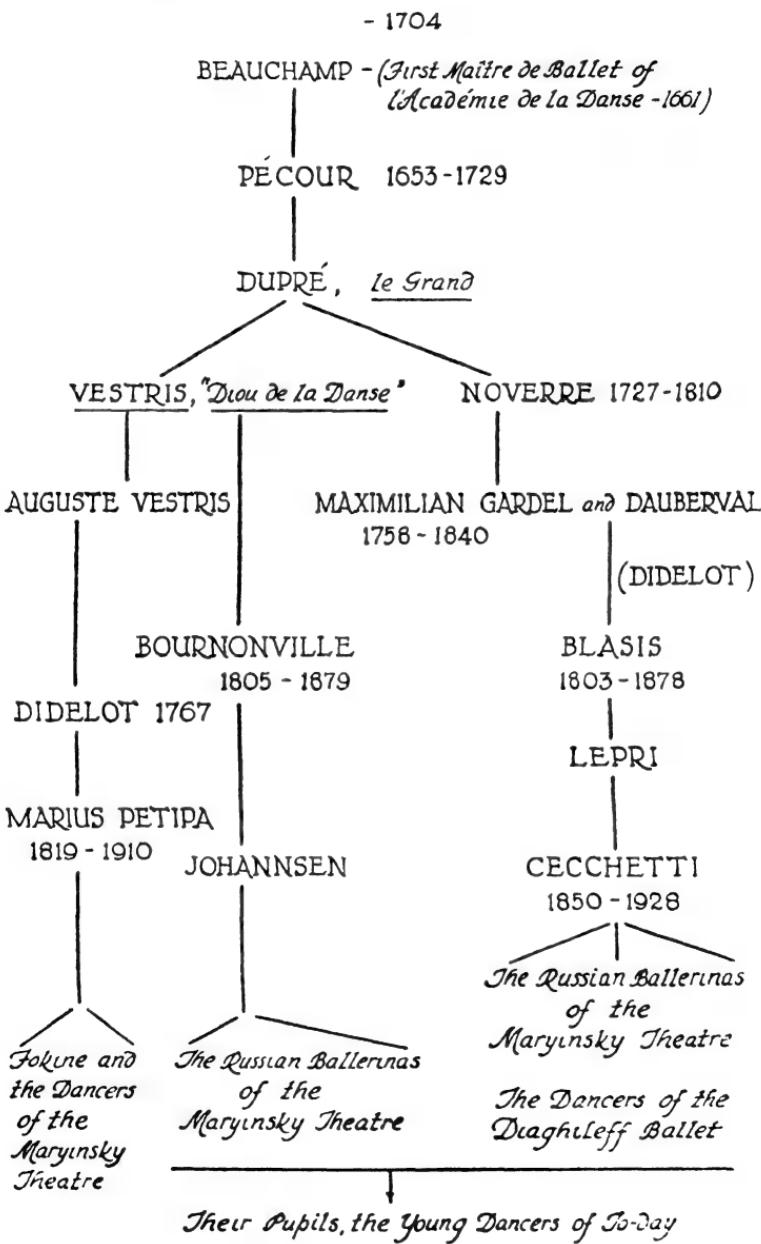
The Academy at Milan influenced Paris and especially Russia through the rules of education drawn up by Blasis which are the ideal in practice up till the present day and which are directly responsible for giving to the dance the cream of the Russian Ballet.

Pupils could not enter the school before the age of eight or after twelve, fourteen in the case of boys. They had to pass a medical test and show a sound heredity. They were bound for eight years, the first three as apprentices. They were then guaranteed financial security by a sliding scale of salaries, so that the moment they joined the school they were free from worry. This lack of financial security has handicapped all dancers away from state institutions. The actual work was carefully graduated throughout the years of training.

This will have to be taken into consideration in any assessment of the present day when short cuts to success are unfortunately the rule, result of the democratisation of ballet. It also kills the superstition that the child must start from the age of two or three, dangerous superstition that damages small limbs and muscles and takes all the joy out of dancing.

Carlo Blasis paves the way not only for Taglioni, Cerrito, Elssler and Grahn, but for Legnani, Zucchi, Kchesinska, Preobrajenska, Pavlova and Karsavina. He spent many years of his life as *maître de ballet* in Moscow.

It is possible now to indicate this influence in a rough and incomplete diagram, incomplete because there are so many more links than it is possible to show. Ballet is and always will be a "family affair", there are no new names suddenly appearing from nowhere. Some of the links in this diagram will be



explained as the story develops, but its correct place is after this brief account of the great Blasis, whose codification put the art on a new basis.

There are similar lines through Taglioni, Grahn and others. Whatever the country it must again be insisted that ballet is strictly a family affair.

(ix) *Auguste Bournonville*

Before treating of the romantic movement as a whole it is necessary to consider the career of yet another remarkable man, an all-important link in the chain.

Auguste Bournonville, 1805, was of French origin, born of a ballet family. His aunt Julie had danced in Vienna under Noverre, his father was *maître de ballet* first in Stockholm then in Copenhagen. In 1824 Auguste Bournonville was attached to the Paris opera for five years as *premier danseur* and he writes in his autobiography, *Ma vie de théâtre*, that it was the happiest day in his life when Gardel considered him worthy of the engagement. Perhaps the greatest moment in his career as a dancer was to partner Taglioni at a fête given before Charles X.*

But Bournonville was far more than a great dancer, he was a serious student of the art, whose great aim, as he himself said, was to combat the opinion of so many people that dancing was a frivolous pastime, and ballet a pretentious and costly absurdity.

As *maître de ballet* in Copenhagen he introduced a national note into his choreography and was ever eager for fresh ideas. When the sculptor Thorvaldsen returned to the capital

* He describes the occasion in his sympathetic memoirs: "She lifted me up from the ground with her and I felt like crying as I watched her dance; I thought to see Terpsichore in person."

Bournonville produced a ballet in which all the sculptor's statues came to life and his many travels were a constant stimulus, through them he imported ballets on Italian and Spanish themes. He produced fifty-three ballets and at the time of his centenary his works had been performed 3166 times and many of them are still in the current repertoire. His greatest direct pupil was Lucile Grahn, creator of the immortal *Giselle*, but his influence has outlived both him and his pupil. It is as the teacher of Johannsen that Bournonville plays a major role in the latest development of the ballet, the Russian.

He also gave ballet a firm root in Copenhagen and from that root has sprung not only a small but flourishing national ballet, but such a dancer as Adeline Gené who has played a big role in English dancing.

The entry of the dance into the romantic movement requires a section of its own, for it brought about both a violent change of aesthetic and a corresponding adaptation of technique. It must be studied from the point of view of the romantic movement in general, its effect on dancing and the ballet, its principal actors and, most important to us, the object of this study, their legacy.

PART TWO

The Romantic Movement

“Un drame ne doit pas être vrai.”

Théophile Gautier

“The rising of the curtain displays one of those delicious spots on the Rhine, bathed in its own rich sunlight, and clad in all the magnificence of its autumnal beauty.”

*Description of Giselle from
“Beauties of the Opera and Ballet”*

(i) Noverre and Gautier: A Difference of View

IN 1830 was celebrated in France the centenary of the great romantic movement represented by Victor Hugo in the drama, Heine, Byron, Walter Scott and Théophile Gautier in literature, Géricault and Delacroix in painting, Berlioz in music.

In France as in no other country the arts mutually influence one another, in England we tend to keep them in watertight compartments. How many English novelists have written works of art criticism or are even capable of selecting attractive book jackets? In France painting and literature have always marched together, the violent reaction against romanticism is expressed by the realists Zola and Courbet, impressionism by Debussy and Monet, and so on as movement inevitably reacts against movement. In France there is an easily charted pattern of fashions in the arts.

Ballet as a composite art is unusually sensitive to every tendency and the reason why to-day Paris still dictates Russian



17 "Grand Pas de Quatre," danced by Taglioni, Grisi,
Cerrito and Lucile Grahn

From a contemporary Lithograph

ballet fashions, if it has left a love and understanding of dancing behind, is because of this close relationship between the arts.

Victor Hugo's drama *Ernani* ushers in the romantic period. Prose gives way to verse, prose is too natural. The theatre must deal with illusion. Better to talk to a workman than to see one on the stage, says Théophile Gautier. In his introduction to Charles Nodier's *Inez de la Serras* he gives an interesting psychological explanation for this, claiming that stories of ghosts and apparitions make a profound effect upon us because of the desire of the soul to be immortal. In spite of the fear that a shade inspires, it is consoling since it reassures us that the earth does not swallow us whole.

Théophile Gautier is not merely the critic of the ballet of his period, and the greatest critic that the art has produced, but its inspirer, its Diaghileff with whom he has an extraordinary resemblance both in his animating genius and in his many inconsistencies. For the first time ballet leaves the jealous hands of *l'homme du métier*, the choreographer and *maître de ballet*, to be guided by the "amateur". It has become an instrument for the poet who completely changes its direction.

"*Un beau ballet c'est la nature même*," said Noverre, *l'homme du métier, par excellence*, not at all replies the poet, it is the very opposite. The dance is only the art of showing elegant and correct patterns in various positions favourable to the development of lines. "Dance for the sake of dancing," says Noverre, "and man will become a machine." "Dance for the sake of dancing," replies Gautier, * "and the poet will supply the reason, the frame and the background."

Then foolhardily the poet goes on to attack the technique laid down by Noverre and recently confirmed by Blasis, foolhardily and with an inconsistency in a direction that Diaghileff,

* These conversations are obviously imaginary, but are based on actual quotations.—A. L. H.

who left technique well alone, never at any time showed. "The turned out positions are ugly and *unnatural*, but we must tolerate them because never will the stubborn and conservative choreographers listen to reason." Later Gautier the critic disagrees with Gautier the theoretician and poet by criticising dancers for their lack of the school that he slighted.

The physique of the dancer, the beauty of her form takes on a new importance. This is not sentimentality but sensuality. Strangely enough there is another glaring inconsistency here since Taglioni who ushers in the romantic ballet is neither beautiful, well made nor in any degree sensual. For this reason Gautier hails her a little grudgingly, and one can sense a prejudice in all his writings though praise and enthusiasm abound.

Where Gautier most resembles Diaghileff is in his love of exciting novelty, in the manner in which he welcomes the introduction into ballet of Spanish or Oriental dances, or of acrobacy that borders on the sensational, such as the leap of the Undine into her lover's arms. Both Gautier and Diaghileff stood for "art for art's sake" and not art to exploit a tendency. Yet gone in theory is the confining purity of the classical dance. The dancer must be the perfect instrument for the whims and the moods of the poet.

A striking difference between the two great animators and between the ballet of France and Russia lies in their view of male dancing. The romantic glorifies the beauty of woman and sees in the male dancer something both gross and ridiculous. Lucien Petipa, brother of Marius, is actually praised because he knows how to keep himself in the background, Perrot and Saint-Léon are greatly admired, it is true, but as very remarkable exceptions. Romanticism banished the male dancer as a personality from Western Europe until Bolm and Nijinsky won his position back in one night, enabling

19 Fanny Cerrito



8 Théophile Gautier





20 Carlotta Grisi in *Giselle*

Serge Lifar to shine as no *ballerina* in Paris to-day, twenty-five years after. Yet apart from Lifar the effects of romanticism continue to haunt the Paris opera, and the role of Franz in the charming ballet *Coppélia* is still taken with ridiculous effect by a woman *en travesti*. The whole prejudice against male dancing which still persists comes from the backwash of the romantic movement. By a strange trick of fate Gautier's posthumous contribution to ballet *Le Spectre de la Rose* was to make the name of a male dancer, Nijinsky, and to be made by him. Had Russia not safeguarded and preserved the male dancer while France was making his position artistically intolerable ballet would have died. The male is an indispensable part of the orchestration of dancing that is ballet and never does the *ballerina* appear to greater advantage than when partnered by a male who is also an artist and a personality. Nijinsky revealed Karsavina, Karsavina Nijinsky.

(ii) *Dancing "Sur les Pointes"*

The romantic movement not only upset the balance of orchestration, it demanded new technical effects. The dancer must no longer be *terre à terre*, she must glide, float and seem to fly. From this moment the tips of the toes, the points, come into the picture and gradually begin to assume an importance so great that they obscure every other department of the art. Whether the dancers of this period used the full point or only three-quarters it does not matter, they ushered in the era of "toe-dancing" that to so many is synonymous with ballet. Our sketch up to this stage will have shown its relative unimportance. The ballet had developed, grown into a completely expressive art and had had its quota of great exponents without the need of points. One must insist upon this and situate the "points" without delay.

In an art where the whole body must be expressive there is nothing illogical in using an inch more of that body, on the contrary, it is strictly logical. To learn "point dancing" is neither difficult nor in any sense dangerous, if the teacher understands what she is about. It is merely something that fits into the general scheme gradually and in cases of normal feet almost unperceived. Cossack soldiers use their points without block shoes or a lesson.

Aesthetically the position is different and there has been an abuse of point dancing, but that very abuse is nothing new and calls for no fresh sanctions. It is merely the abuse of any technical device that does not fit in with the theme or style required, with Noverre's warning against turning man into machine. The aesthetic of Noverre allows for the legitimate use of every technical device.*

Properly understood as every technical device it greatly enlarges the scope of expression. Technically by diminishing resistance it makes turns easier and neater, aesthetically it expresses liberation, flight, lightness, the incorporeal state that is a legitimate theme for so many ballets. When a novelty as all novelties it was used for its own sake and abused.

"Even at the beginning of my directorship" (1902), says the late Prince Wolkonsky, "although by then great creative dancers had emerged, the atmosphere was much the same. I remember a new production of *Tannhäuser*. The dances in the first act, the bacchanal in the Venus grotto, had been staged by the great Petipa himself. At the dress rehearsal I was horrified, it was just *tip-toe, tip-toe, tip-toe*, the whole time. The nymphs were *ballerinas*, never forgot it themselves and never let the audience forget it. Think of it, during that wonderful accord which an invisible chorus sings behind the scenes, we

* See Appendix, page 114: "Skating over thin Ice, or Buddha in the Frigidaire."

saw three *ballerinas* cross the plateau on their *points*, grinning sweetly to an *enraptured audience*.

“I gave orders for the scene to be changed, but nobody could understand in the slightest what I wanted. *The dancers had elicited applause*, how could there possibly be anything wrong?” At all costs the public wanted the trick and it took all Fokine’s combative powers to put it into its place with the rest of the “tricks” which properly understood constitute dancing. It was as much as anything the cause of his leaving Russia.

The use of the toe or as much of it as was then available was logical enough in the romantic ballet; *La Sylphide* had to move so very differently from her highlander and his mortal bride. Fokine restored the balance, but he did not use the “points” in *Scheherazade* as his immediate predecessors would inevitably have done.

This section, out of all proportion to the scale of the book, about an inch of flesh, bone and blood is made necessary both through those who hate ballet and through those who love it but are ignorant of its background.

Let us again say that ballet dancing and toe dancing are not synonymous, and leave it at that.

(iii) *Taglioni—La Sylphide*

The romantic movement in Ballet made a first timid appearance in 1827 with *Le Sicilien* and established itself beyond a doubt five years later with *La Sylphide*.

We have seen the aesthetic behind the movement, let us return to the stage itself and study the high priestess of the cult.

Marie Taglioni was born in Stockholm in 1804, the daughter of a Swede, Anna Karsten and an Italian *maître de ballet*, Philippe Taglioni (1777-1871). Her father is interesting because

he not only formed her, but created the ballets in which she made her name.

He was trained by a variety of teachers, among them Coulon, Gardel and Milon in Paris and Salvatore Vigano in Italy, to whom he owed much of his orientation both in the choice of subject and in the treatment of dancing and mime as an organic whole, which he attempted in his best-known work *La Sylphide*, though later from all accounts he departed very far from Vigano. He was certainly a sensitive artist able to feel the new direction that was required of ballet.

Dr. Véron, director of the Paris opera, in his memoirs draws a picture of Taglioni as the most exacting of all masters making the little Marie dance until she almost dropped from fatigue, and contrasts this scene of the morning with her effortless aethereal performance at night. Dr. Véron, also, makes an interesting contrast between the methods of Vestris and Taglioni, the former demanding that his pupils inspire passion, the latter delicacy and even austerity. Taglioni has been called the first of the Christian dancers as opposed to the pagans. This is where the great inconsistency arises between the dancer of romance and the poet of romance. Taglioni always kept her dance within the limits of classicism, justifying Thackeray's remark in *Pendennis*, "will the young folks ever see anything so charming, anything so classic, anything like Taglioni?"

She may have inspired the movement, she was always outside it in the sense that from every account her art would not have dated. Her triumphs were the result of artistry and not of a beautiful face at a time when a beautiful face counted for so much. Her figure was never perfect and it is said that she was badly round shouldered (almost a hunchback some accounts have it) before her father's meticulous training. We can divine her importance and artistic greatness from the



21 Marie Taglioni in *La Sylphide*



22 Marie Taghoni as the Butterfly

eulogies as well as the reserves. She is clearly head and shoulders above her more attractive and showy rivals.

She made her *début* in Vienna, 1822, with great success, from there to Stuttgart and Munich where her art became a revelation. Her first appearance in Paris at the theatre of the Porte St. Martin, 1824, passed almost unnoticed and she returned to Germany and Italy. Then Paris again in *Le Sicilien* and five years later *La Sylphide*.

It is interesting to know something of this ballet, that was to prove one of the most important in history and of which Gautier wrote, "This ballet opened up for choreography a new era and it is through it that romanticism was introduced into the domain of Terpsichore. After *La Sylphide*, *Les Filets de Vulcain* and *Flore et Zéphire* were no longer possible: the opera was surrendered to gnomes, undines, salamanders, willis, pixies, peris and all those beings strange and mysterious who lend themselves so well to the fantasies of a *maître de ballet*. The twelve marble and gold houses of the Olympians were relegated to the dust of the storehouses and only the romantic forests and valleys lit by the charming German moonlight of the ballads of Henri Heine exist."

A new colour, white, finds its way into ballet and like every novelty is used to excess.

"Pink tights always remain pink, without tights there is no dance, only the Greek sandal gives place to the satin shoe. This new style brought about a great abuse of white gauze, of tulle and tarlatans, shadows melted into mist through transparent dresses. White was almost the only colour used."

To-day *ballet blanc* is synonymous with classical ballet and not romantic, strange confusion of terms.

This epoch-making work was from an adaptation by Adolphe Nourrit from Charles Nodier's story *Trilby*, with music by

Schneitzhöffer. I will outline the story, using in part the words of a contemporary.

"In a farmhouse of Scotland at an early hour. . . . In the corner of a vast chimney Gurn a mountaineer is sleeping heavily. . . . James, a Highlander of more poetic temperament dreams . . . he sees an aerial form, whose lovely eyes beam, whose rosy lips smile, sweetly upon him. This enchanting vision is the enamoured Sylph, the Fay of the blooming fields, the sprite of the homely cabin.

"This delicate form dances around the sleeping youth; and as she dances she murmurs . . . the infatuated creature! . . . 'Say wilt thou not love, if but a little, the gay sprite of the chimney corner?'"

He is awakened by her kiss. It is his wedding morning and he is to marry the lovely Effie. All is rejoicing but James is in love with his vision and breaks off abruptly in the middle of a round dance to follow the Sylphide, who "flies from the chamber, throwing one parting Parthian glance to see that she is followed—Too surely for Effie, whose bridegroom hastens after her viewless rival". In the garden James meets and dances with the Sylph, holding her in his arms.

The scene is once more the farmhouse: The folk at the bridal say, "Fie, Jamie's daft!" . . . they have made allowance for a supposed fit of distraction and agree that he *must* marry his pretty little cousin.

He returns, Effie is crying and all plead for her. "There she stands, her innocent bosom heaving with anxiety and sorrow. . . . Effie's lips and his own are once more together.—To the bridal, ho!"

An old hag in the corner volunteers to tell the fortunes of those present. She tells Effie that James no longer loves her. James attacks the witch but Gurn, secretly in love with Effie, defends her and claims that he can prove James a false lover.

As he is talking the Sylphide glides invisibly through the window and goes to stand by James who feels her presence as does Gurn, who insists that she has gone to seat herself in a chair under a plaid. They lift the plaid:

“But where is the Sylph; Has she melted in air;
He knows not, he sees not; but nothing is there.”

Gurn is humiliated and the rejoicings recommence, but once more the Sylph appears and James runs out in pursuit.

It is now night in a deep dark forest where witches are holding their incantations. They have been plotting to use the innocent Sylph to cause both her wretchedness and that of a mortal. They have woven a magic scarf which they entrust to the old hag.

It is morning and James is discovered in a beautiful glade. He has found a nest as a gift for his beloved and now he finds her and hands her the nest. But she cannot bear the thought of dooming the birds to captivity and floats to the tree-tops with it. They walk happily together and the sylph introduces him to her sisters by the lake. They sport with him, bind him with garlands of flowers, his love vanishes and reappears tantalising him. Selfishly he wants her always with him and seeks advice of the witch, who gives him the scarf.

“This twined around her, secures her thine in life and death.”

He throws it around her and then a transformation takes place. Her wings drop off, she sinks lifeless. The gentle vision disappears. James is left disconsolate as a bridal procession passes, that of Effie and the less imaginative Gurn.

This story in almost endless variations satisfied the romantic longing of the public and gave Taglioni scope for her artistry. It has come down to us to-day at any rate in atmosphere in *Les Sylphides*. The dark wood is there, the man and the sylphs.

The tarlatans they wear are an inheritance from Taglioni. The story in its essentials might be used to-day. It is an admirable pretext for expressive dancing with a dramatic contrast between mortal and immortal. If it has not survived, we must blame the music. In *Apparitions*, *La Symphonie Fantastique* and *Francesca da Rimini* the romantic craving of the present day has been satisfied. It will always exist in ballet, alongside of satire and actuality.

(iv) *Fanny Elssler*

Taglioni did not shine alone in undisputed glory and romanticism required other and more robust aspects. Fanny Elssler best personifies the aesthetic of Gautier.

The Elsslers were two sisters, Fanny and the lesser known Thérèse who subsequently retired to marry morganatically Prince Adalbert of Prussia.

Fanny was six years younger than Taglioni, a beauty in face and figure. "L'allemande Fanny Elssler avait l'air d'une Andalouse de Séville," said Gautier. Her father an Austrian (and not a German) had been a copyist to Mozart, who interested himself in the child.

She had made a considerable reputation in London when Dr. Véron, director of the Opéra, brought her to Paris in 1834 to dance in a ballet, *La Tempête*. Taglioni remained supreme until two years later when Elssler launched the cachucha in a ballet *Le Diable Boiteux*, and the castle in Spain began to rival the German moonlight as an atmosphere for romance, and allowed Gautier some polite but unmistakable digs at Taglioni. "Spiritualism is a quality to be respected but in dancing we can make some concession to materialism."

He stresses Taglioni's Christianity, Elssler's paganism and



23 Fanny Elssler in her dressing-room

VALSE FAVORITE DE GISELLE.



his catalogue of Elssler's charms allows us to see that he is on the side of the pagans.

Bournonville gives an interesting contrast between the rivals: "If La Taglioni was more experienced technically, Elssler found her revenge in character ballet. There where Marie could draw tears of admiration, Fanny evoked smiles of satisfaction."

Europe was split into two camps, Taglioni or Elssler. Greatly daring Elssler challenged Taglioni on her own ground *La Sylphide*, Gautier was praising, mentioned that Taglioni was "a dancer for women", praised Elssler's temperament, but it was an unmistakable triumph for the Taglionistes.

Camargo and Sallé, Elssler and Taglioni as did Bernhardt and Duse represent types that still exist. It is possible to argue ceaselessly on their respective merits long after they have become but memories. Such arguments enjoyable as they invariably are can in reality amount to nothing more than an opinion of taste.

(v) *The Pas de Quatre and Giselle*

There were other prominent names in this golden age.

Fanny Cerrito, the "divine" Fanny of the London public where she danced many years before her Paris début, made her greatest success in *Ondine* in which she had a famous shadow dance and in *La Fille de Marbre* with which she conquered Paris. Gautier after remarking that Paris alone could confer reputations and that the enthusiasm of London and other cities was often mistaken gave her a welcome, less warm than that of London, commenting on her plump well-rounded arms and her well-developed bosom so pleasing after the usual scragginess of the dancer. "She was *bondante* in her dancing, *abondante* in her person" said a critic. The year of her retirement,

1854, she appeared in a ballet devised with him, *Gemma*. Lucile Grahn, a Dane, was born in 1821 and made her début at fourteen in *La Muette de Portici*. She first appeared in Paris in 1838 and danced *La Sylphide* in the following year. It was to her that Gautier gave the remarkable lesson in miming, to which all dancers should listen, saying that a smile should hover about a dancer's lips like a bird flutters about a rose and that for a beautiful woman the play of the eyes is sufficient to animate her face.

Grahn appeared in the famous *pas de trois* in the *Judgment of Paris* with Cerrito and Taglioni which was nearly as great a sensation as the *Pas de Quatre*, Taglioni, Cerrito, Grahn and Grisi.

For us the most important after Taglioni is Carlotta Grisi, sister of the famous singer and very nearly a great singer herself. Carlotta was born (1821) in Upper Istria in a palace that was the residence of Francis I. Touring in Italy she met Perrot, becoming his pupil and his wife. She made her Parisian début in 1840 as singer and dancer in *La Zingara*. She had "a voice of pure and exquisite melody, a step as light as the winged zephyr". In 1841 she made her greatest success in *Giselle*, a ballet that has survived and that to-day is in the regular repertoire of the Paris Opéra and our own Sadler's Wells.

Giselle or *Les Willis* is a ballet in two acts by MM. de St. Georges, Théophile Gautier and Coralli on a theme suggested by Heine and to music by Adolph Adam. It has survived because its simple story contains the concentrated essence of romance, it is the embodiment of a whole period.

The story tells of a simple village maiden so fond of dancing that her feet are kept in almost continual motion. Her mother fears according to local superstition that at her death she will become "a species of dancing vampire". But she replies,



25 Marie Taglioni



26 Therèse Elssler



27 C. L. Didelot



28 Auguste Bournonville

Scrapbook of the Romantic Ballet (figs. 25 to 35)

31 Carlotta Grisi



30 Jules Perrot



29 Fanny Elssler





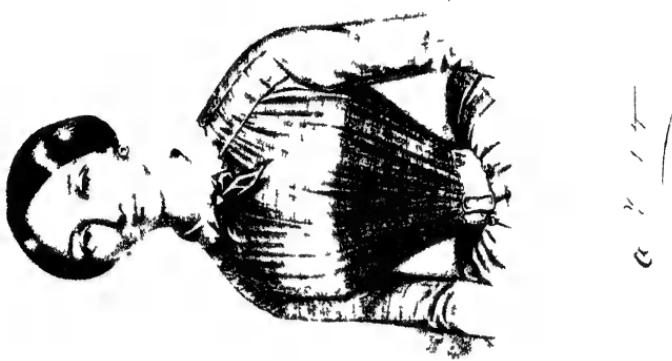
32 Fanny Elssler



33 Marie Taglioni



34 Lucile Grahn



35 Adelina Plunkett

“Nay *one* dance more, *only* one—a very, very little one.” She falls in love with a handsome stranger only to find out cruelly from the mouth of a villain that he is a Prince and can be nothing to her. Her mind becomes unhinged and she dances once again, her feet tottering no longer controlled by a happy carefree mind. She seizes a sword and, plunging it into her side, dies a suicide.

The next act in a wood by Giselle’s grave shows her a *willi*, dancing vampire who inveigles men to their doom. Her lover comes to lay flowers on her grave and is caught by the *willis*. Giselle intercedes for him, but in vain. He also wishes to remain with his love. She begs him to stay under the protection of the cross and the dawn saves him, the *willis* disappear, and heartbroken he lays Giselle in her grave.

“Carlotta Grisi, most ably seconded by Petipa, has made this second act of the ballet a species of acting poem—a sort of choreographic elegy of the deepest pathos, as well as elegant sentiment, and more than one eye among the audience was dimmed with a tear, when expectation had only looked for admirable and surpassing dancing.”

Giselle is the greatest of all tests for the artist who claims to attain something more than “admirable and surpassing dancing”. Act I represents the body, finishing in the most dramatic scene in all ballet where the body continues the dance unguided by the mind. Act II the Soul and the dancer who can triumph as did Pavlova in both comes but once in many generations. If *La Sylphide* launched romanticism in ballet, *Giselle* has given it permanence.

(vi) *The Heritage of the Romantic Movement*

What survives of the romantic movement, *Giselle*, and all the *ballet blanc* is known as classical, Fokine in his revolt against

this ushered in a new romanticism, which some have also called classical. There is an obvious confusion of terms here. Both are based on the pure classical technique and because in these ballets that technique is shown to extraordinary advantage, they are called classical. Actually what they express is romantic. There are not sufficient works surviving to make this error of nomenclature important, it is merely interesting in showing with what rapidity the rebel works of one generation are deemed classical by the next.

To-day of what is purely romantic in date *Giselle* alone exists, though *Swan Lake* is a Russian aspect of romanticism. However the movement has greatly enriched us in many ways, developing point technique and elevation, presenting the dancer as an aethereal being from another world, laying open a storehouse of picturesque literature for the choreographer to draw upon. The Romantics paved the way for Anna Pavlova as well as for the exotic of Bakst and *Scheherazade*, and the criticism of Gautier is a model of sensitive writing for future generations.

It is in the romantic period that we first hear of *Le Foyer de la Danse*, later immortalised by the realist Degas and other lesser artists.

Dr. Véron gives an interesting description of this meeting-place of *balletomanes*.

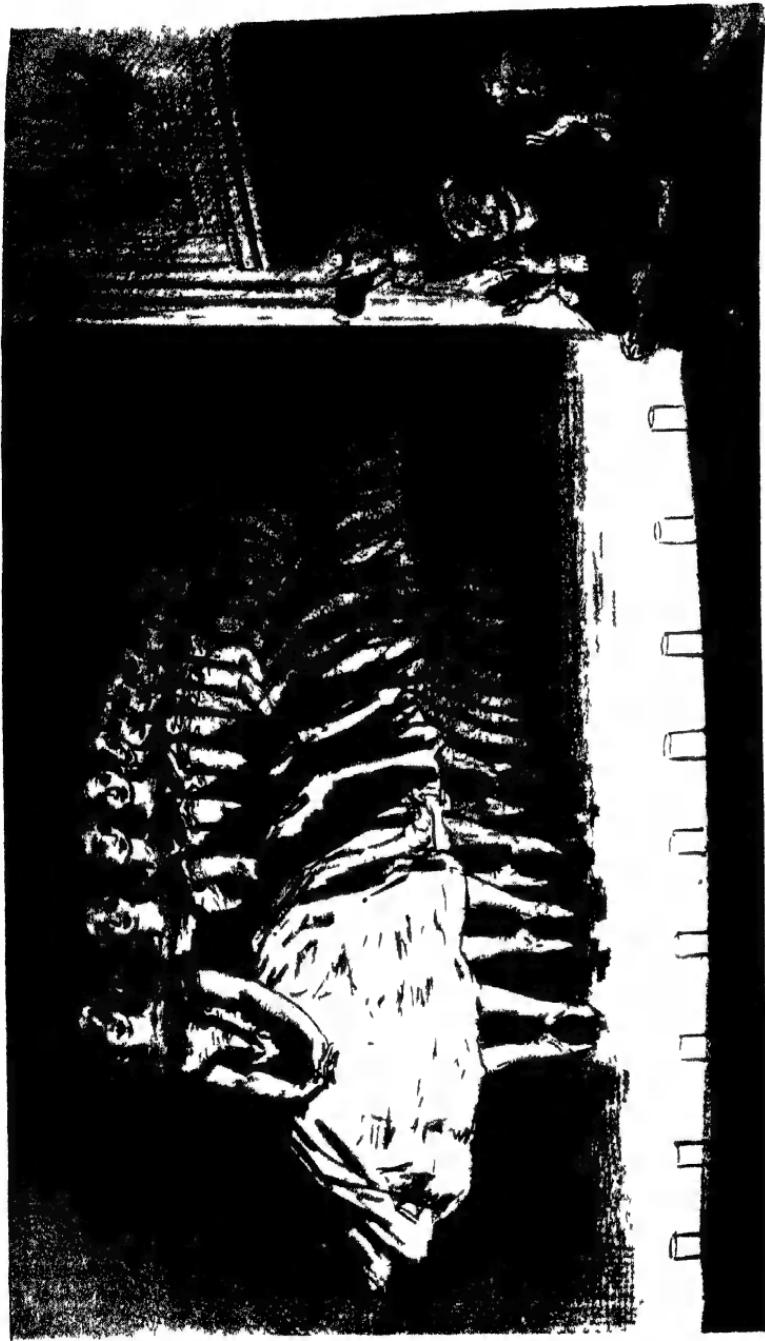
“*Le foyer de la danse* is situated behind the theatre . . . at night it is brightly illuminated; everywhere there are large mirrors; and the floor has a sharp rake. In front of the mirrors, a little higher than the belt are fixed round bars of white wood. Before *de se mettre en train* (it is the actual expression) the dancers raise one leg after the other until they can place the foot horizontally on these wooden bars and leave it stretched there for a time; then they drop this position and seizing one of these bars turn to their *battements* and *jetés-battus*. After these



F. Mallett 11. 11.

Adèle Dumilâtre and Lucien Petipa

36 Adèle Dumilâtre and Lucien Petipa in
The Marble Maiden



37 "Les Rats de l'Opéra" : from a lithograph by Gustave Doré

preliminary exercises they wet the floor with a pretty little watering-can; then standing in front of the full-length mirrors they try numberless *pirouettes* and *entrechats* and rehearse, before going on the stage, more or less seriously the steps that they are about to dance.

“ . . . One met in the theatre and especially in the *foyer de la danse*, ambassadors, deputies, peers, ministers and the best society. . . .

“ . . . There was nothing more varied, more gay or picturesque than this bivouac of dancers. In this heathen temple sacrifices are offered only to Venus, Love, Fortune and Terpsichore.”

Yes, this period has offered us something invaluable that cannot be concretely assessed—the glamour of ballet.

PART THREE

Ballet in Russia and Russian Ballet

“L’art vrai ne craint pas des conceptions nouvelles.”

“La danse classique, qui est à la base de l’art chorégraphique, ne pouvait disparaître dans un pays où le culte de l’art constitue une des particularités de l’âme du peuple.”

“On chercherait vainement une organisation qui ait fourni au théâtre autant de danseuses classiques, de genres et de talents aussi divers que le Ballet Impérial Russe.”

V. Svetloff in “Anna Pavlova”

(i) *Early Days*

(Note: Since Russian history is not universally known it is important in connection with this section to have some idea of the dates of the various monarchs in order to be able to check the events with the happenings in Western Europe.

Peter the Great	..	..	1686-1725
Catherine I	..	..	1725-1727
Peter II	..	..	1727-1730
Anne	..	..	1730-1740
Ivan VI	..	..	1740-1741
Elizabeth	..	..	1741-1761
Peter III	..	..	1761-1762
Catherine II (The Great)	..	..	1762-1796
Paul I	..	..	1796-1801
Alexander I	..	..	1801-1825
Nicholas I	..	..	1825-1855
Alexander II	..	..	1855-1869
Alexander III	..	..	1869-1894)



38 Nijinsky, as the Slave in *Scheherazade*



40 The tragic Damlova



39 Dupont: a contemporary broadsheet

The beginning of this chapter of the story is at a period far removed in time and that seems still further distant through the country in which it is situated, a vast and unknown continent that has till Peter the Great played no part in the life of Europe, that is not till then a part of our familiar reading, and accounts of which only reach us from the letters and diaries of adventuresome travellers who write of the barbarity and the splendour of Muscovy.

However far removed the beginnings of the story, however great a stretch of the imagination it requires to form even a vague picture of it, its ending carries us right up to the present moment and it has not yet ended. It is impossible to put *finis* to this chapter while the Russian influence in the dance is still the greatest.

We start with the supremacy of Paris and Milan, we end with both these capitals no longer calling the dance, with the supremacy of St. Petersburg and Moscow so firmly established that the *Académie Nationale de la Danse*, cradle of the art in Paris is in the charge of a Russian, dramatic reversal of roles from the time that the Frenchman Landé became the first to rule the Russian school in St. Petersburg, the Italian, Carlo Blasis in Moscow. In one hundred and fifty years the Russian conquest is made certain, after over two hundred years it still persists. Astonishing tale of the aptitude of a whole nation for an art born at the court of French Kings.

At the start Russia comes late into the picture. The first hint of national dancing is an account of a tight-rope walker in the sixteenth century who gave lessons in drum beating and dancing, while in the seventeenth century in France some "Muscovites" are mentioned for the first time who came to learn with the French masters at the court of Louis XIV and who angered their teachers by the scant attention they paid to their lessons.

It is under Peter the Great that the first impetus was given as a part of the Westernisation that forces the boyards to shave their beards and that started the emancipation of women. It was obviously impossible to develop the dance at a time when women were kept severely apart, when nobles were bearded and clad in dignified but cumbersome robes. Peter, inspired by his travels, determined to force his people to learn the refinements of the West so that eventually they could teach themselves. The first development of the dance in Russia was an unimportant detail of his whole policy, a small fragment of the plan to make Russia take its place in Europe. Under Peter, therefore, the dance developed socially rather than theatrically. As all social dancing its final goal was the stage. He scandalised the church by making his boyards, their wives and daughters take part in French dances, clad in European clothes, in itself a sacrilege. The greatest scandal of all in the eyes of the church was to mask a god-given face and in the reign of Ivan the Terrible there had even been a martyr, a Prince Repnine, who chose death rather than to mask his face.

It was through these social dances then that French influence began to penetrate into Russia. Peter established Assemblies in 1700, the *Terems* (women's quarters) were thrown open and dancing rapidly became an indispensable social accomplishment.

The Empress Anne was fond of pageantry and her court was a fabulously wealthy one and it was in her reign that the Imperial Ballet school was founded in the Winter Palace under a French *maître de ballet*, Landé. Dancing was thought important enough for a special official to be engaged to teach it to the cadets. A national ballet was becoming an institution and there is an account of a dancer, Timothy Boublikoff, being sent abroad for two years to study "the art of the theatre" with a salary of 500 roubles a year appointed by Imperial ukase.

The Empress Elizabeth, a great beauty, was an excellent dancer herself and still further stimulated the growth of ballet, encouraging as her predecessors had done the visits of distinguished artists. One of them, an Austrian Hilferding, met with outstanding success and his troupe introduced to Russia for the first time some of the more complicated technique that was then being developed in Western Europe.

Under Catherine the Great it became an accepted thing for the "stars" to visit Russia to make their fortune, and the Frenchman Le Picq and the Italian Angiolini brought their knowledge to her court and gave a new character to the ballet.

(ii) *The Serfs*

This marked interest of the Queen had an enormous influence on private people, wealthy nobles who had almost a court of their own and who vied with one another in the giving of private entertainments. At the same time as the Empress was summoning teachers from abroad to instruct the few, a knowledge of dancing was being absorbed by the serfs belonging to these nobles, and this national love and understanding of the theatre in every class is a feature that belongs to Russia alone. More than anything it accounts for the long held supremacy and instinct for all things dramatic in spite of those accidents of history that have killed the theatre in those other countries of violence, Germany and Italy. The founder of the national theatre, glory of Russia under both Tsars and commissars, was a serf, Michael Chepkine.

These nobles lived in a wild country, in estates sometimes as big as the whole of England, they had to provide their own comforts and amusements, and being able to dispose of

numberless "souls" it was natural to train them as musicians, actors and dancers as well as cooks and hairdressers. One noble, the Count Cheremetieff, possessed two vast territories, Kouskovo and Ostankino, with a theatre in each.

It was at Kouskovo in 1790 that one of the most picturesque ballet romances occurred, in itself a subject for a ballet.

Cheremetieff met Pauline Kovalevsky, a peasant girl attached to his *corps de ballet* and fell in love with her. He had her properly trained and under the new name of Jemtchougova (pearl) she made a great success in *Inez da Castro*. When Catherine visited Kouskovo she was chosen to dance in the ballet *Les Noces de Samnith*. Little did Catherine know that the beautiful *ballerina* was going to upset one of her most cherished plans. She intended the Count for her granddaughter Augusta. It was only after Catherine's death that he was able to marry the *ballerina*.

If such romantic happenings were rare, the serf ballets grew in importance and the Imperial ballet was able to acquire many dancers and even whole troupes by legacy and purchase. In 1829 Moscow bought a troupe of twenty-one dancers from M. Rjevsky. It was possible to distinguish serfs from freemen on the bills, just as we to-day distinguish Gentlemen from Players, by the use of the simple surname in the case of the serfs. But gradually the serfs in the Imperial Theatres were given a chance of emancipation and finally under Prince Galitzine were made free, the system being considered undignified. This was half a century before all the serfs were given their freedom.

It will be seen that the roots of art in Russia went deep into the people. It is the one feature that distinguishes Russia from all the other countries in this story.

(iii) *Didelot, Duport and the first Russians*

Alongside the foreign dancers Russians were rapidly making their way and this reign saw the first Russian *maître de ballet*, Liesogorov, known on the stage as Valberg, there was also a Russian *prima ballerina*, Birolova. By now the art was indigenous, though Russian supremacy was still distant by nearly a century.

The modern period begins during the short reign of Paul with the arrival of the French dancer Charles Louis Didelot, a man of wide culture, as have been all the pioneers in ballet.

Didelot was born in Stockholm in 1767 where his father was a teacher of dancing. As a young man he made an excellent impression in spite of being badly disfigured by the smallpox, and the King of Sweden sent him to Paris to study under Dauberval. On his return at the age of fourteen he made a success in a *pas* of his own composition and was again sent to Paris to continue his studies under Auguste Vestris. At the same time he attracted the favourable attention of Noverre. He danced in London and then in Paris with La Guimard and caused a sensation by his ballet *Zéphire et Flore*, using for the first time wires to simulate flying, later a very favourite device. In 1801 he went to St. Petersburg at the summons of Paul I. As a teacher he formed a whole generation of Russian dancers, among them the legendary Istomina, heroine of two duels, sung by Pouchkine in *Eugene Onegin* and the tragic Danilova. Didelot brought the romantic ballet to Russia, but its victory was less complete than elsewhere and owing to its firm national roots ballet retained a contact with reality.

Didelot was greatly helped in his development of ballet by the publication of Noverre's letters in Russian in 1804 and by the French dancer, Duport, who arrived in Russia in 1808 under a three years' contract. Duport's débüt in August caused

such a sensation that the smart public returned from its holidays *en masse* to see him dance, and so popular was he that fashionable women wore earrings called "souliers d'or à la Duport". Tolstoi introduces him in *War and Peace*. "There in that vast illuminated hall where on the moistened boards Duport leapt to the accompaniment of music bare legged and clad in a vest decorated with *paillettes* young girls and old men shouted bravo in ecstasy. . . . The cymbals and trumpets began to play louder and a man with bare legs began to leap very high. That man was Duport, who received 60,000 roubles a year for his art. Everyone in the parterre, in the boxes and in the Gods began to applaud and to shout with all their might, and the man stopped, smiling and bowing in all directions."

Duport arrived in Russia with his mistress, the celebrated Mademoiselle Georges and induced Marie Danilova his partner, a young Russian dancer of great beauty and talent to fall in love with him. Then he left her and the poor girl is said to have died of a broken heart. Her story became a favourite theme with Russian poets, Ismailoff composing the well-known epitaph:

"Near to this urn weeps Terpsichore,
And the graces too are weeping:
The ashes of Danilova, of the young friend of Duport,
are resting here."

Duport was also a choreographer of ability, though he made his greatest name as a dancer in Didelot's ballets.

He left Russia in 1812 after Napoleon's retreat and died in Paris in 1853, leaving a vast fortune.

When Didelot and Duport left Russia there were a great number of native dancers and the ballet took on a more national character choosing many patriotic themes, but this was merely an interlude.

The next important event was the arrival of Taglioni in 1837 and so great was the sensation she caused that "balletomania" reached the limits of absurdity, a group of the most rabid purchasing a pair of her shoes, for 200 roubles, having a broth made of them and solemnly drinking it at a banquet. It can be imagined the delirium she caused when two years later she performed a Russian dance in a sarafan!

The many seasons of Taglioni not only increased the public for ballet but served as an excellent example for the Russians. Only Zucchi after her and Pavlova in our day has exerted such a mass influence, turning the thoughts of thousands to dancing as a career, convincing the sceptic that here was a serious art.

It will be noticed throughout this section that the Russians, starting with Peter the Great, have never been narrowly chauvinistic. It is a prominent feature of the Russian character to love what comes from abroad and the rapidity with which they learnt the dance is due to the whole-hearted manner in which they received Didelot, Duport, Taglioni, Grahn and others. Any form of artistic protection is a danger. On the other hand there is a very definite handicap in a snobbish point of view that uncritically praises everything foreign at the expense of the national development. In England we have been bad offenders in that respect, lacking great faith in the artists that we produce.

The most prominent Russian *ballerina* at this epoch, Elena Andreyanova, must have fought a hard battle. The famous ballet historian Alexander Plestcheeff writes of the public apathy when she appeared in the roles made famous by Taglioni and it was only in 1842 in *Giselle*, a ballet new to Russia that she was able to make a name, gradually becoming a national glory. She was the first to carry the news of Russian prowess abroad, appearing with success in those two strongholds of tradition, Paris and in Milan, where a special medal

was struck in her honour. A long journey, since the first Muscovites had through their inattention so disgusted their French teachers. In spite of her success Andreyanova was haunted her whole life by the memory of Taglioni.

The next series of names carry us right up to modern times, they contain one Russian a non-dancer, director of the Imperial Theatres and the last foreign names in the story of Russian ballet, Johannsen, a Swede, Petipa, a Frenchman, Cecchetti, an Italian and the *ballerinas* Legnani and Zucchi, both Italians. These dancers were giants, but not of the same stature as Noverre or Gardel. No longer does the dance know men of such encyclopaedic erudition. In the future as we shall see it needs a committee of men to replace the one. Yet working on the lines laid down by Noverre and Gardel these three men made the ballet of to-day. Encyclopaedists and craftsmen, dancers both intelligent and stupid, famous or to-day obscure have all played their part.

(iv) *Christian Johannsen*

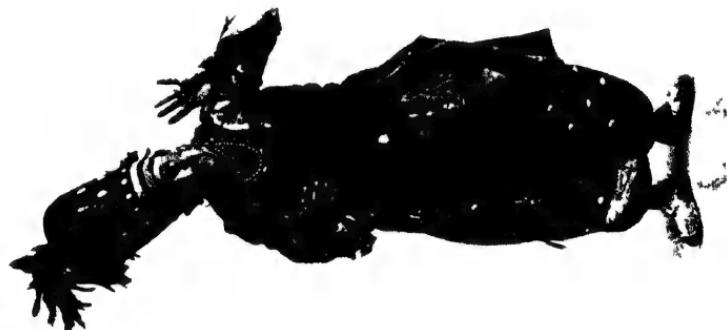
Christian Johannsen was born at Stockholm in 1817 and was sent to study in Copenhagen under Bournonville. He made his St. Petersburg début in 1841 with Andreyanova. He was still teaching in 1906! In no other part does longevity play so great a role.*

* Among the "key" dancers mentioned in this book:

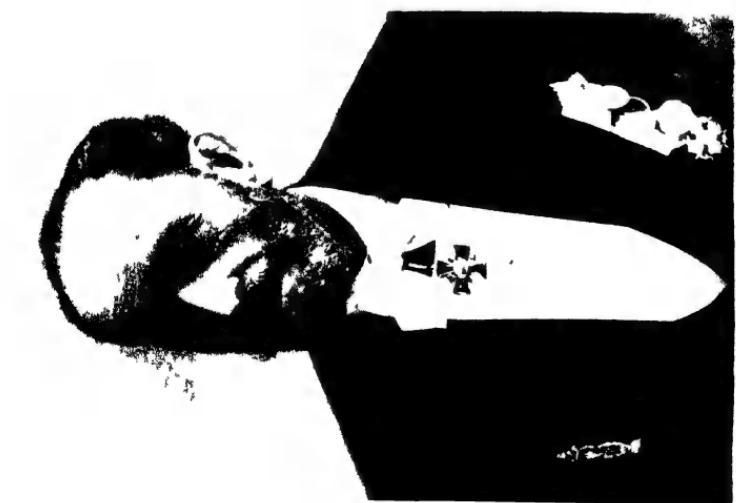
Pécour	lived	till	74
Dupre	"	"	77
Noverre	"	"	82
G. Vestris	"	"	79
A. Vestris	"	"	82
Bournonville	"	"	74
Taglioni	"	"	80
Petipa	"	"	88
Johannsen	"	"	93
Cecchetti	"	"	78
Zucchi	"	"	77



43 Christian Johannsen



42 Enrico Cecchetti



41 Marius Petipa

The Founders of Russian Ballet

44 Virginia Zucchi



45 Marie Petipa



47 Eugenia Sokolova



46 Marie Petipa as a Bride





49 Olga Preobrazhenska



48 Mathilde Kchessinska with her Father

Johannsen left the stage in 1884 to start as a teacher and all the young *ballerinas* passed through his hands. Kchesinska has said that rarely could a man teach women so well and Pavlova has paid tribute to him. His influence was both direct and indirect for Gerdt was a pupil of his (and Petipa's) and also taught the majority of the *ballerinas* including Pavlova, and it was Gerdt who first noticed her unusual gifts and developed her frail physique along the right lines. Although Petipa's is the better known name thanks to his ballets that have survived, Johannsen's influence was probably greater as regard school and as a former of *ballerinas* he stands alone, representative of the pure French tradition which blended with Cecchetti's Italian tradition became the Russian ballet we know.

Actually the French method is in the greatest proportion in the Russian school, Cecchetti only coming on the scene later. Nicolai Legat, a teacher at the Imperial Schools and an influence both in Russia and abroad has said that the Russian School is the pure French School forgotten by the French themselves. These distinctions are very real but need not be dwelt on in a sketch such as this.

(v) *Marius Petipa*

While Carlo Blasis was in Moscow and for a time in Warsaw, Marius Petipa was forming the St. Petersburg School.

Petipa, born in Marseilles 1819, belonged to a family troupe of touring dancers. Stranded in Paris thanks to a dishonest impresario—they existed then as now—he became a pupil of Auguste Vestris, and after two months had the good fortune to dance with Carlotta Grisi at a benefit given for the great actress Rachel. His brother Lucien remained at the Opéra in Paris and a comparison between the careers of the two brothers

is interesting. Lucien who may have seemed the fortunate one at the time and who from all accounts was equally talented reached, as we have seen, a dead end since the romantic movement had killed all opportunity for male dancers, and not till Nijinsky arrived in Paris in 1909 did male dancing come into its own. Marius found almost immediate success in Russia. He arrived in 1847 after a short engagement in Bordeaux and four years in Spain. Perrot was then in charge of the ballet and Petipa enjoyed ten years of work with him and became his successor in 1862. His activity in Russia lasted from 1847 until 1910. His father settled in Russia as a dancing teacher, he himself became completely Russianised and married a talented dancer Marie Sourovtschekova. Their daughter Marie was as famous for her beauty as for her dancing.

Petipa unlike Noverre and other great choreographers, had the unique advantage of being in charge of the same company throughout his long career. In all he created 57 full-length ballets, equal to 171 at the present day, 34 opera ballets and undertook 17 revivals. In addition he was responsible for all of the work shown on the stage of the Maryinsky Theatre. His name therefore clearly marks a whole epoch. He gives to Russian ballet an academic principle, against which it can and will revolt when the time comes. He found a dance of grace and turned it along paths of virtuosity, demanding the highest technical standards from *corps de ballet* as well as principals; a true innovation. Moreover, his work was able to interest such non-ballet composers as Tchaikovsky and Glazounov and through them to alter the entire position of ballet and make it a part of the national artistic life. When he arrived the foreign dancer was the rage, when he died the Russian *ballerina* was not only everywhere pre-eminent, but ballet itself was almost extinct in the countries of its origin. Certainly the time came when while his word was still law his ideas belonged

to another age, but by then what he had founded was solid enough to give birth to new ideas.

His speciality was the grand fairy-tale spectacle in which the *ballerina* shone and the male dancer was relegated to the background. It was seen at its best when it was tempered by the romanticism of Tchaikovsky and there it has survived. But the truncated versions still in the repertoire give an inadequate picture of his work. By a natural influence *The Swan Lake* tends daily to lose the diamond hard brilliance that was its characteristic and take on the character of *Les Sylphides*, the work of the great pupil exerting a posthumous influence on the master.

Later when we discuss the work of Fokine there will be a further opportunity of examining the academism of Petipa.

(vi) *Enrico Cecchetti*

Enrico Cecchetti was born in the Tordinona theatre, Rome, in 1850. Like so many of the characters in this book he came from a dancing family. His father Cesare was a *maître de ballet*, his mother, Serafina Casagli a *ballerina*. From the moment of his birth he lived in the atmosphere of the theatre and by the age of five he had already made a tour of the United States. He was sent to Florence to study with Giovanni Lepri, a pupil of Blasis, and he even had the opportunity of meeting the great encyclopaedist face to face and of receiving from him encouragement and the advice to work hard. At the age of nineteen he made his débüt at La Scala, Milan and subsequently danced all over Italy. He appeared in London at the Empire with Katti Lanner and *The Times* compared him to a "little rubber bouncing ball". In 1874 he went to Russia for the first time and in 1887 took out an Italian troupe to dance in a pleasure park during the summer. Through his success

he was engaged by the Imperial Theatres, making his début with Nikitina in *The Tulip of Harlem* and dancing with Zucchi in *Le Roi l'a dit*. He remained for fifteen years in St. Petersburg as dancer and professor. Cecchetti was an expert mime as well as a virtuoso dancer, rare combination and he proved it by creating the role of The Blue Bird in *The Sleeping Princess*, still to-day the touchstone of classical male dancing, and the Fairy Carabosse in the same ballet. When Cecchetti arrived Petipa was already well over sixty and there was a certain amount of friction between the two schools. The two together developed into Russian Ballet, and that much abused term has therefore a very definite meaning that is quite apart from the narrow standard of nationality. Petipa, the Frenchman, Johannsen, the Swede, Cecchetti, the Italian working on generations of Russian dancers developed Russian Ballet, as much a system as French or Italian Ballet, and, to-day, the ideal of dancers the world over.

In 1902 Cecchetti left to teach at the Imperial School in Warsaw and his influence has resulted in a fine tradition of male dancing that is represented by Woizikovsky, Idzikovsky and others, but Warsaw did not finish his career. For a time he was private teacher to Pavlova, giving her enormous technical strength. All that is easily understandable, the strange part of the story is his association with Diaghileff which brought him right into the modern ballet movement.

Cecchetti was in no sense a man of wide culture. He did not devise a movement nor even a truly deliberate system of education. The dance was a part of him, his whole heritage and education. He was a link with the great tradition and he taught what he knew by experience. To-day there is a Cecchetti method, a valuable code, but only if it is taught by a great teacher, who can add to it something of his own. It should be abundantly clear by now that while a book may inspire it

cannot teach dancing, and that the teacher who adds nothing personal is almost a failure. Cecchetti did not delve into the philosophy or artistic nature of the dance, he was a great dancer and he became a great pedagogue. It is to the credit of Diaghileff that in spite of his love of novelty he chose the old *maestro* to form his dancers, taking with him on tour, as it were, a portion of the Maryinsky Theatre. Diaghileff understood Cecchetti, but Cecchetti neither grasped nor sympathised with most of Diaghileff's aims and did not conceal his disgust at many of the new productions. However, he provided the material for all these experiments, teaching the already experienced Karsavina and Nijinsky, forming Massine and later Lifar, Danilova and the English child, Markova and innumerable others. Also, he taught many in England including Ninette de Valois and Marie Rambert, who play a big rôle later on.

With his wife by his side, also a born teacher, more patient by far, he continued to dance almost till his death. The present generation will remember many remarkable performances as the Eunuch in *Scheherazade*, the lovable shop-keeper in *La Boutique Fantasque*, and the Marquis in *Les Dames de Bonne Humeur*.

When Cecchetti died his grateful pupils of the Diaghileff ballet on tour in the English provinces danced *Sylphides* with black mourning scarves. With him died a whole epoch. He was the bridge not only between the past and the present, but unlike anyone else between Russia and Western Europe.

(vii) *The amateur of culture*

The Russian who most influenced the ballet at this epoch of transition was the director of the Imperial Theatres, A. Vsevolozsky. This post was one of considerable importance.

The director was responsible to the Emperor direct for the conduct of the theatres and had at his disposal a budget that few professional theatre men have ever handled. He required a diplomatic manner and something more besides. The director Prince Galitzine had already brought in sweeping reforms by emancipating the serfs bought for the Theatres and also by making the conditions of entry into the school depend on aptitude rather than on patronage.

With the disappearance of the "universal genius" type from the scene, the amateur of culture begins to play a large role, culminating in the figure of S. P. Diaghileff, and each component part of ballet is left in the hands of experts, who act as a committee. Gone for ever are the days when ballet could come from the brain of one man.

Among the most notable of these "amateurs" was the director of the Imperial Theatres during the reign of Alexander III, Vsevolovsky. Two actions of his altered the direction of the Ballet in Russia making it into Russian ballet.

The first was the engagement of Italian artists to give it a new vitality, a bold step as we shall see, the second was to commission *The Sleeping Princess* from Tchaikovsky, for which production he himself designed the costumes. This production not only gave new life to Marius Petipa, but interested a serious musical public in the ballet and gave the world a work that survives in every repertoire. One of the dancers engaged by Vsevolovsky was Virginia Zucchi who moved Russian ballet more profoundly and directly than any other dancer, including Taglioni herself.

(viii) *Virginia Zucchi and the last "foreigners"*

Virginia Zucchi was born in Parma in 1851 and was early apprenticed to a troupe of travelling dancers, where she learnt

her art; for a time she was a pupil of Giovanni Lepri. In 1873 she made her débüt at Padua in the ballet *Brahma*, securing a dramatic triumph that opened to her every stage; Rome, Milan, Madrid, Paris, Berlin and London.

She came to St. Petersburg in 1879 to perform *Brahma* on a small suburban stage, that was nothing better than a cabaret. It was midsummer, all the *balletomanes* and the court circle were away, but before a half-empty house Zucchi made her name and her fame spread throughout the city. A great dancer was great news in those days. Then, unheard of thing, Vsevolovsky engaged this "cabaret dancer" for the Imperial stage. The controversy aroused was enormous and it was at the heat of the moment that her great champion, the enlightened critic Skalkovsky, wrote the famous words, "there is more poetry in Zucchi's back than in all modern Italian literature", words that he was not allowed to forget. Her great and obvious success soon silenced all criticism and she dominated the Russian stage until the year 1888, shining especially in *La Fille de Pharaon*, *La Fille mal Gardée*, *Paquita*, *Coppélia* and *Esmeralda*.

Zucchi was a *terre à terre* dancer of no exceptional virtuosity and she came at a time when virtuosity was an ideal and dancing had grown perilously close to acrobacy. She turned the attention once again to mime and brought execution and subject closer. The whole history of ballet has been this constant struggle between subject and execution, mime and virtuosity and the greatest periods have always been when execution has served the subject, the greatest dancers have been the greatest actresses.

As in the case of La Guimard I will quote many contemporary views of her, since they paint an excellent picture of the times and show better than any mere assertion the important role she plays in this narrative.

The first account is from the late Prince Wolkonsky, an enlightened but unfortunate director of the Imperial Theatres in 1902, a man of great erudition and a reformer with many of the same ideals as Diaghileff.

"The first time I went to the ballet I was a child and it was to see the *Fisherman and the Naiad*. I liked the fairy side of the performance, I liked the *corps de ballet*, but frankly I disliked the solistes. Even in those early days I felt shocked at their affectation, and the technique which was stressed to an almost acrobatic extent left me quite cold. I could neither grasp the difficulty nor the charm of it, so tremendously did the 'un-truth' offend me. It was true to no convention, illogical, absurd, unnecessary.

"Then Zucchi came to me as a great exception and a great revelation. I saw that ballet dancing could have a 'meaning'. She was one of the greatest mimes I have ever seen. Everything about her seemed to speak—yes, shoulders, hands and fingers. I shall never forget her lovely expressive back when she turned it to the public. In *Brahma*, an indifferent ballet, there was a scene where she never failed to make people cry, as she implored the priests to save her. Think of it; she had to conquer music, story and décor as well as the mood of the public who had come to the ballet to see tricks! What was unusual, also, was that her movements in their preparation and their climax fell in time with the music."

Most direct was her influence on the little group that surrounded Diaghileff, Benois and Nouvel. Diaghileff did not start as a *balletomane*—as a keen musician he rather despised an art in which a Minkus or a Pugni represented the average, and it was Benois and Nouvel who turned his thoughts to ballet. Benois has told me how he played truant to see Zucchi dance and how it was she who gave him his first interest in ballet and made him see its value as a medium.

51 Mathilde Kchesinska



50 Vera Trefilova



53 Michael Fokine



52 Tamara Karsavina



Nouvel says:

“Some of our critics and the public were inclined to make Petipa responsible for the bad state of the ballet, saying that he was growing old and merely repeating himself. Vsevolozhsky wished at all costs to do something positive . . . at the grave cost of offending all the nationalists, he engaged Virginia Zucchi. It was a master-stroke that awoke our dancers from their long sleep. Zucchi was a genius, so vital and stimulating that no one could remain indifferent to her influence.

“Of all our group only Benois, Somov and myself had seen her. We were only schoolboys, but she was our idol. I remember when she came back to dance in a small theatre, how we waited for her at the stage-door and when she appeared took off our coats and spread them on the ground in front of the carriage. She gave us a charming smile and we were proud and happy that night. Her example proved that the dancer as an artist could be the equal of a Sarah Bernhardt or a Duse.”

I quote one more opinion, since no history of the dance has yet done Zucchi complete justice, that of Mathilde Kchessinska, great *ballerina* who made her biggest name in *Esmeralda* and who as a teacher has formed many of the present-day dancers.

“Virginia Zucchi was one of the greatest artists I have ever seen. There are some dancers whose performance excites you at the time and leaves you with nothing. After all these years I can still see Zucchi. It was my greatest inspiration to watch her in the wings and my greatest lesson.”

A whole group of Italian dancers followed Zucchi and met with success, among them Carlotta Brianza* who created the

* Brianza was also associated with the revival of *The Sleeping Princess* at the Alhambra in 1921, taking the role of the Fairy Carabosse, a sentimental gesture that appealed to Diaghileff.—A. L. H.

role of the Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Princess*, Cornalba, Limido and Pierrina Legnani. A long way after Zucchi Legnani was the most important of these. She was the last of the great foreign stars to secure the great roles. She was not an actress, but a dancer of dazzling virtuosity and impeccable precision. She popularised, if she did not actually invent, the *fouetté* so familiar to-day and her thirty-two *fouettés* in *The Swan Lake* were an event. She never missed them and after feverish counting on the part of the audience would wind up to a thunder of applause.

This *fouetté* of hers was greatly debated and some study of it helps us to connect technique and artistry in ballet. Svetloff wrote in his *Le Ballet Contemporain*:

“The quantity and the complication of classical steps grows; certain of them, such as the *fouetté* of which strong dancers can perform as many as thirty-two belong to acrobacy or at any rate gymnastics. . . . Let us think, in theory if instead of thirty-two *fouettés* a dancer can perform forty-eight, or sixty-four or any given number: what will happen? The human being will become a machine. . . .”

Dancers to-day can perform forty-eight or sixty-four and have not yet become machines, for the trick is no longer exceptional and choreographers have used it in connection with the sense of the story, as the spinning of the top in *Jeux d'Enfants*, for instance. When Legnani first startled the world with it its use was less logical, though dramatically in *Swan Lake* it could be defended since while dazzling her audience she seeks to dazzle the Prince.

Legnani aroused the sense of competition in the Russian dancers and undoubtedly hastened their complete triumph. When Kchesinska, the first of them, learnt to perform the sensational feat there was general rejoicing in which patriotism played its part.

55 Olga Spessivtzeva



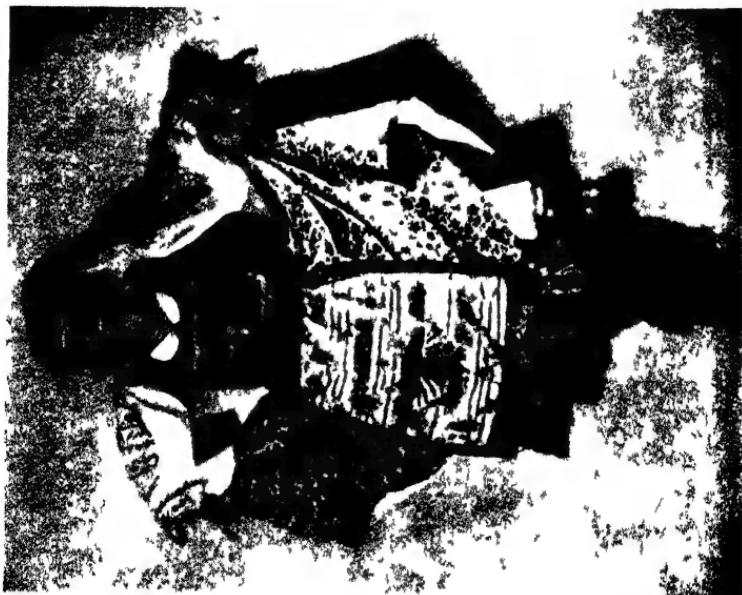
54 Karsavina and Fokine in *The Fisherman and the Pearl*



57 Lydia Lopokova



56 Lydia Sokolova



(ix) *The Russian Galaxy*

The first great group of *complete* Russian dancers are fortunately, with the exception of Anna Pavlova, still active and amongst us. After an introduction here they will appear once again in the contemporary scene.

It would be difficult to imagine a finer flowering of ballet talent. They had taken to them all the influences that I have outlined, they were the direct and logical outcome of the work and study of generations and for the first time in the history of ballet the tradition was in the hands of one institution alone.

Mathilde Kchesinska, the *ballerina assoluta*, was of Polish descent. Her father, a famous exponent of the mazurka left Warsaw for the St. Petersburg stage and remained there. His daughter made rapid progress, became a favourite at court and was soon a national figure. She excelled in such roles as *Esmeralda*, and joined wit and intelligence to very great technique.

Olga Preobrajenska rose from the *corps de ballet* by sheer hard work to become one of the most popular dancers in Russia, excelling in comic roles, but versatile as they all were. Her influence to-day as a teacher through the hard analytical work that she undertook to make herself a great dancer is the greatest of all.

Vera Trefilova represented the pure classical influence that made her *Swan Lake* unforgettable. She had fire and temperament in plenty, they could be sensed, but she kept them in check. They gave the most difficult feats meaning and poetry. Her work had exceptional nobility and when she danced in London in 1921 for Diaghileff she demonstrated to the public the meaning of Russian classicism, the nobility of large flowing movements, the concealment of technical difficulties, their subordination to the role.

These great dancers, Egorova, Vladimiroff and others dominated the Imperial stage of St. Petersburg until the revolution, only occasionally dancing abroad and then not under ideal conditions. But by then the centre of activity had shifted from Russia to the travelling company of Serge Diaghileff.

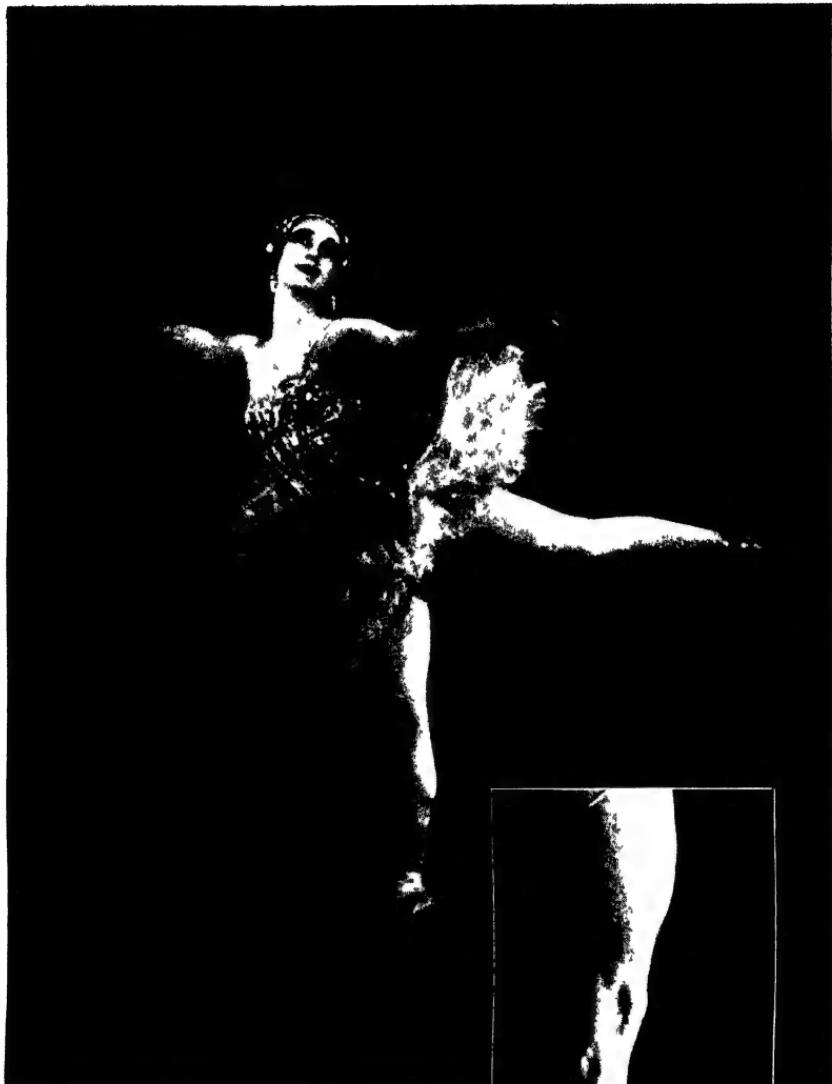
(x) *Pavlova*

Anna Pavlova, a Russian *ballerina* of this grand epoch must be treated at some length and on her own.

Pavlova's public was entirely different from that of the Diaghileff ballet, different and larger by far. Her artistry has been commented upon lamely enough both by others and by myself on endless occasions. It is not my intention to add to that commentary here, but to place her in the balletic scheme of things alongside Camargo, Taglioni and Zucchi, those individual dancers who influenced the development of the art almost as much as the Beauchamps, Noverres and Fokines who made them dance. Pavlova was born of the system I have just discussed, she became at first its greatest ornament, then the inspiration of those that rebelled against it and finally she followed her own glorious path, an individual who touched both the old and the new at points.

Anna Pavlova was born in St. Petersburg, 1881. She passed into the ballet school at the customary age of ten at her own very great wish. She was frail of physique, a type altogether unusual at the ballet schools at a period when thirty-two *fouettés* were an ideal, when a high degree of virtuosity was in great demand. She finished school at the age of seventeen with the grade of *première danseuse*. She was instantly marked out for a glorious career. As the late Valerian Svetloff, a spectator on that historic occasion, wrote, "it was on this evening that for the first time the public saw the pupil Pavlova,





59 The Legs of Anna Pavlova





61 Pavlova and Vladimiroff

and it was on this evening that for the first time she attracted the attention of everybody". This young pupil was a direct link with the main tradition of the art both in France and Italy; pupil of Christian Johannsen, the pupil of Gustav Bournonville, the pupil of Vestris, *le dieu de la danse* himself. Later she was also taught by Enrico Cecchetti, pupil of Giovanni Lepri, pupil of the great Carlo Blasis. No one could have had a more distinguished artistic ancestry, a fact that is of the utmost importance. That same aristocracy will be found in the records of all the truly outstanding dancers. It is for that reason that I am so insistent on the early scenes of this ballet panorama, they colour the whole of the contemporary scene, making its direction clear.

One of the earliest ballets in which Pavlova confirmed her growing reputation was *Giselle*. She had not only the temperament and the dramatic ability, but the perfect physique able to make the spiritual second act convincing in spite of the difficult technique required, in spite of the quaint and very pedestrian music. Her success in such a role once again turned the attention to the romantic white tarlatan period and made her the focus of those who were dissatisfied with the Italian inspired over technical development of ballet. The repertoire of the Imperial Theatres was not sufficiently elastic to allow her to shine as often as she deserved, Fokine was the creator obviously suited to her, and Fokine was not yet acknowledged at home. Also, the Russian *balletomane* was a diehard of the diehards and there were other favourite dancers so firmly established that they made her position a delicate one. She left the Imperial stage to join Diaghileff and with her there left a part of the old tradition and a strong new tradition that was to be planted wherever she danced and the whole world was her stage.

In the Diaghileff milieu she was also not completely in her

place, as we shall see when we investigate his aesthetic, and for various reasons artistic and personal she left him to start her glorious career as an individual.

There are those who say, and I said it myself at the time, that she would have performed greater artistic work with Diaghileff. To-day with more experience and the opportunity of viewing her as a part of history I can see that that judgment was wrong. She would only have been able to follow Diaghileff for a very short period until Fokine's departure in 1912 and while Diaghileff in his later phases was going in for reckless modernistic experiments she alone preserved the standards of the main tradition. Together they maintained a perfect balance and without the two together the whole of the contemporary scene would have been entirely different. Her public was the whole world, his the coterie of brilliant artists, pseudo-artists, aristocrats and pseudo-aristocrats whose round consisted of Paris, London, Monte Carlo and Venice. Looking back upon the last phase of both Pavlova and Diaghileff one is forced to the conclusion that it is his work and not hers that appears old-fashioned. The *Swan*, beyond question a masterpiece, and even the ancient *Fille Mal Gardée* when she performed it had a greater artistic integrity than *The Blue Train* or *The Cat*, amusing seasonal adventures. Pavlova has left an inspiration, Diaghileff a method of collaboration, a recipe that can and is being carried on. It is possible to show his direct influence on a chart, hers is less concentrated but none the less powerful. We owe to her a world audience, to many her name is synonymous with the dance, and to her example we owe an example of perfection that has filled dancing schools from London to Brisbane.

Both Pavlova and Diaghileff demonstrate the extraordinary vitality of ballet as a theatre art form. With them we start an entirely new period, that of the democratisation of ballet.



62 Karsavina and Nijinsky in *Giselle*



63 The First London Performance of *Les Sylphides*, 1911



64 *Les Sylphides*, danced by the de Basil Company
quarter of a century later

Previously, as we have seen, this has been a story of courts, Imperial Rome, Versailles, St. Petersburg, with the ballet first as the playground of monarchs, next as the plaything, upon which they lavished money. The Russian *balletomane* is represented by the *abonné* who sits in the front row of the stalls, the box-holder and the members of a definitely privileged class. Pavlova and Diaghileff start a ballet revolution twenty years before the great social upheaval. They give ballet to the general public, to anyone who can produce the price of a stall, and essentially to the gallery queue. Ballet not only survives but grows in strength, finds a vast public in America and the Dominions. And in Russia herself the institution that was the favourite of the court survives that court and becomes the favourite of the commissar and the industrious workman. Ballet popularly supposed to be a hot-house flower is hardy, an evergreen. The new public and the altered conditions mean a change of direction from the grandiose to the comparatively simple save in Russia where a commissar's money is as productive as an Emperor's.

The greatest effect of this ballet democratisation brought about by Pavlova and Diaghileff has been economic. Pavlova was unique in her popularity, Diaghileff enjoyed many subsidies, but it is obviously impossible to-day for ballet to make such rapid artistic strides when it must keep one eye on the box-office. Pampered it could try experiments, to-day experiments cost too much. Also when the box-office calls the tune the dancers are forced and inevitably made to work too hard. The result must be an early and an incomplete flowering. Ballet will adapt itself and exploit new aspects of the dancer, but gone is a certain finish so great a feature of the dancers of yesterday. This change from Tsar to box-office is ballistically a greater change than from Tsar to commissar and will be underlined in future histories of the ballet.

The story of the part played by the great *ballerinas* who remained in Russia, Pavlova's predecessors and contemporaries at the Maryinsky Theatre, by a strange freak of history belongs as we shall see to the contemporary scene. Pavlova was exiled in a sense through their strength, because of her individuality that gave her the desire to shine alone, Diaghileff because his aesthetic was years ahead of the bureaucratic machine, the great Maryinsky *ballerinas* as a part of the emigration that followed the revolution. For these causes the centre of creative activity shifted from Russia, a gradual emigration that lasted from 1907 until about 1920. The accident of revolution that had scattered so many French dancers and had undoubtedly enriched Russia once again plays its part in the strange history of ballet, half accident half design.

The ballet in Russia still continues shut off from the rest of the world, perfect in training and execution, old-fashioned and definitely pre-Diaghileff in its aesthetic. *The Red Rose* is in form the least revolutionary of all ballets. It is impossible to say what will follow but Russia to-day no longer belongs to the living art of ballet. It is a museum of what was accomplished in the days of Tsardom.

(xi) *Fokine and Diaghileff*

Like Pavlova the Diaghileff movement is an offshoot of the Imperial Russian Ballet, starting its life as the travelling group of the great and wealthy parent organisation.

In any formal history of the group it is difficult to know with whom to start, Benois, Diaghileff or Fokine, but in a study of ballet tradition Fokine's is the obvious name, and on the whole Fokine has in many quarters had insufficient credit for what he has accomplished in the past. Not unnaturally, perhaps, since he is so much still a part of the contemporary scene.



65 Lydia Lopokova in *The Sleeping Princess*



66 Michael Fokine to-day : Limbering

When Fokine started to emerge as a conscious artist eager to express himself the way was blocked not so much by Petipa as an individual as by the *balletomanes* who applauded his work and had grown up in his tradition. To praise Fokine does not mean to denigrate Petipa. Fokine could not have existed without Petipa, each one is the great man of his period, very far ahead of the public that watched their early work and damned them in the name of a predecessor. Petipa himself generously foresaw the greatness of Fokine and encouraged him. I have drawn a picture of the ballet at the time of Fokine's emergence. To-day a portion of Petipa's work still remains, curtailed and unconsciously greatly altered by the viewpoint of the modern dancer. It was inevitable for the movement to beget its own rebel, as every academic movement has done, a rebel who one day will head a new academy. Fokine is wrongly thought of as a revolutionary and my own word *rebel* is misleading. He did not destroy or break with all tradition, on the contrary, in many respects he returned to the tradition of Noverre that had long been forgotten. He preserved intact the legacy of teaching that had come down from Carlo Blasis. The very basis of the dance remained unchanged and has survived intact to this day. He merely evolved a new use for it, at one time simpler and more complex. Simpler in the sense that he departed further from acrobacy, movement for the sake of exploiting difficulty, than had ever been done before, more complex in what the movement had to express and most especially in the relation between music and movement.

The simplest relationship between music and movement is the one in which music is merely a rhythmic accompaniment to movement. That is the primitive relationship of the two, strangely enough the one which the modernist dancers with their percussion accompaniment invoked so shortly after the war, when the Central European school of dancing, a form of

war neurosis began to interest a wide public especially in the United States where there was as yet no ballet tradition. It is significant that in England the new movement never gained ground. England had already become the champion of ballet. Fokine like Noverre wished to establish an equal partnership of the arts that compose ballet, one in which the harmonies in line and colour of the painter, in pattern and atmosphere of the music, and in step, gesture and mime of the dancer expressed parallel emotions. To-day the idea seems obvious, then it was a startling rediscovery. Fokine also postulated a naturalism within the convention of ballet, which we also take for granted. Any work to-day that offended against this would be laughed off the stage. It is interesting to note in passing that Lucian awarded the palm to ballet as against opera for this very reason, and laughed at those works that offended against his sense of naturalism.

Petipa and Fokine can be directly compared in their bird dances. Petipa's *Blue Bird* is a brilliant dance, Fokine's *Swan* goes much deeper and is in substance a drama of life and death. *The Swan* was a manifesto of a new departure.

Another great reform in the spirit of Vaganova consisted in the use of the *corps de ballet*, a reform that has had the most far-reaching consequences of all in the development of the dancer. Before his time ballet had three or four *ballerinas*, whose career was evident almost from the moment of their graduation, a handful of *solistes* and the remainder an ornamental background, highly drilled as *Tiller girls*, but with as little personality save in the mass.*

In *Les Sylphides* Fokine produced a ballet in which each dancer had to be an artist, had to understand something of the content of Chopin's music, in *Carnaval* he went still further

* They were known as "près de la fontaine", as an ornamental fountain was a usual background.—A. L. H.

and produced a work in which each dancer is an artist with a role, in which each role is highly characterised and the old *corps de ballet* completely forgotten. Even in *Scheherazade* where a large number of dancers are employed on the stage they emerge from the mass and become individuals for a moment or two, while *Petrouchka* is a complex work with fifty or more characters, acting almost the entire time. Compare any one of these works to *Swan Lake*, even the very modernised version we know to-day, and the distance between Fokine and Petipa can be fully appreciated. Moreover, Petipa in partnership with Tchaikovsky is Petipa at his greatest and from contemporary accounts one can imagine the sixty odd ballets that have not survived. Fokine's use of the *corps de ballet* which has since been extended by Massine and Nijinska has made possible the modern conception of a ballet company, as a body that does not depend upon stars for the successful presentation of its works. Stars there will always be, the public makes them in a season or so, but instead of accepting one star, the public creates half a dozen or more and there is constant movement within the composition of a company.

In that way Fokine has extended the influence of dancers and made possible the growth of ballet the world over. Later we shall see the small solistes who because they were taught to think and behave as individuals were able to found movements of great importance, ultimately playing a bigger role than many a star performer. This principle has been damaging only in one direction, it has made a first-class *corps de ballet*, on the rare occasions when it is still required, into almost an impossibility.

Fokine shifted the focus of the public from legs and feet to the whole body, did not destroy the point, but used it in accordance with his theories of naturalism. Romantic ballet had made the point a necessity, how else could a dancer seem

truly aethereal? But the conquest of the point and the blocking of shoes had made toe-dancing a synonym for ballet and the horrible term, a reproach if ever there was one, still persists, used by fond parents to express the particular activity of their children in pantomime. If Isadora Duncan in condemning ballet actually meant the indiscriminate use of *toe-dancing*, then she was perfectly correct.

(xii) *Isadora Duncan*

Isadora Duncan plays a certain role in this story, a smaller one than is popularly believed. This inverted puritan of genius, compelled by an inner urge to express herself in the dance, came from outside the tradition we have been following. The tradition she claimed was that of Greece, but it was not a tradition as much as a sentimental view of the far distant past inspired by visits to the museum. She was a great artist and she would still have been a great artist had she been brought up in the tradition of the classical ballet. Her range would have been greater and the tragedy of her final appearance might well have been avoided, since the discipline of the orthodox technique would have given her a hold on sanity as well as a firm basis for self-criticism. She was great in spite of being outside tradition and not as her admirers would have it because of her defiance. Her theories on dancing are too vague and nebulous to bear analysis and her attacks on ballet often unfounded and always due to a misunderstanding, the belief that the class-room exercises were the art and not merely the medium. It would be as logical to attack painting after looking at a palette and a paint box.* Moreover, she was gloriously

* At least one dancer made her forget the technique of ballet. "I am an enemy of ballet which I consider false and absurd", and in the very same sentence . . . "I could not help applauding the fairy-like apparition of Kchesinska fluttering on the stage more like some charming bird or butterfly than a mortal."—A. L. H.



68 Alexandre Benois



67 Léon Bakst



70 Alice Nikitina and Anton Dolin
in *Zéphyr et Flore*



69 Vera Nemchikova and Anatol Vilizak
in *Aurora's Wedding*

inconsistent when she attacked the use of shoes in dancing, comparing their use to that of a pianist wearing gloves. According to this comparison the use of a piano, a thoroughly artificial instrument, is to be condemned in itself and the dancer should appear naked and not hampered by any clothes at all! To attack artistic tradition by invoking nature (not naturalism within the convention) is logically to hold an altogether impossible position.

It is for these reasons that I belittle not Duncan's status as an artist, but the extent of her influence on this art whose strong tradition we have so far followed. Influence there certainly was. Isadora Duncan came to St. Petersburg at a time when the technique of dancing was paramount, when there were half a dozen dancers of exceptional merit but when ballet itself was almost at its lowest ebb. She discarded traditional costume and shoes, as Sallé, a ballet dancer had done 250 years before. She danced to the music of acknowledged composers and tried to interpret their feelings. She immediately attracted the attention of all those who were dissatisfied with the actual state of



ISADORA DUNCAN, 1912

From a Drawing by Bourdelle

the ballet, among them the young Fokine who was enthusiastic, for here was an artist who echoed his own feelings. I have no doubt that her example was a strong inspiration, especially in the use of music that it had previously been considered sacrilege to touch. Where the influence may be most felt is in the Greek ballets. His first *Eunice* was directly inspired by her, but in *Daphnis* and *Narcisse*, later works, he has gone altogether further than Duncan, through using a more highly trained medium. To see as some have done her influence in the majority of his work is absurd. Nothing could be further removed from Duncan than the romantic, the Russian or the Oriental series. This so-called influence amounts to nothing more than a general inspiration of the kind a good and brave artist can give to another and a hint in the production of the Greek works, certainly not more than a hint, for Fokine is as much a museum man as Duncan and his Greek choreography is based on a very detailed knowledge of Greek sculptural accents. Duncan's greatest role may have been in interesting a public of artists and sensitive people to the dance medium which they had previously misunderstood. In any case she remains the only dancer outside all tradition whether national or ballet to play a role in this story.

(xiii) *Russian Ballet leaves Russia*

What played the most important part of all in the formation of the young Fokine was his wide education in the true Noverre-Blasis sense of the word and his catholicity of taste. He was an accomplished musician theoretically and in practice, he painted with skill and he had also passed through the dramatic schools. Had circumstances not given him a chance in ballet he would certainly have excelled in one of the other branches of art.



71. Serge Diaghileff on Tour with Members of his Ballet





74 Jean Cocteau, with Sokolova, Dolin, Worzikovsky and Nijinska, after the *premiere* of *Le Tran Bleu*



73 Serge Diaghileff, with Walter Nouvel and Serge Lifar

Ballet is born of its dancers and *maîtres de ballet*, but Lully and Beauchamp must also have their Louis, Istomina her Empress Anne and if the Imperial Theatre is not ready to receive Fokine's ideas, he must find a substitute or leave ballet aside, as he so nearly did.

Fortunately for the art Fokine was to find his Louis and something more in the person of Sergei Pavlovich de Diaghileff, for Diaghileff was far more than a Mæcenas. His guidance of the dancers and choreographers under his charge was greater than they realise and certainly greater than they would ever care to admit. In a sketch such as this it is quite impossible to assign to him the actual role that he personally played in the history of ballet. I have attempted that elsewhere. But it is only fair to state that without him his most famed collaborators, dancers, choreographers, painters and musicians could only have given a fifty per cent result.

Alexandre Benois and his small circle of artists and thinkers by whom the journal *The World of Art (Mir Isskoustva)* was later formed were in their way as disgusted with official art as was Fokine with official ballet. Each was tackling his problem from very much the same point of view, to replace an artificial academism by a living formula. This is a superficial manner in which to describe an important artistic movement, but here we are only concerned with its immediate effect upon the ballet and its tradition. Benois' group led by the vigorous young Diaghileff, who through them had had an admirably catholic training in the arts hit upon ballet as the perfect medium for the expression of their new ideas, a medium that combined all the arts and the one best calculated to produce rapid results. Previously they had had no close connection with ballet, though Benois had always loved it and through the Italian dancer Virginia Zucchi had learned how expressive dramatically a dancer could be. It was only natural that this

group should find a similarity of aim with Fokine, Pavlova and the new generation of dancers, irked by the formula of a veteran. There was no accident in that, a collaboration was in the natural sequence of events. Accident brought about by the conflict of personalities, however, was responsible for the fact that the fruit of their collaboration ripened in Western Europe and not in Russia, bringing about the democratisation of ballet and its wide spread, the wholesale emigration of dancers, the biggest event in the history of a previously pampered art.

Diaghileff entered the service of the Imperial Theatres under Prince Wolkonsky (1902), a highly cultured man who was also a reformer by intention, quarrelled with him and was shown the door. Even so the new conception might have had a showing had not Wolkonsky in his turn come into conflict with La Kchesinska in which he was ousted and the directorship of the theatres fell into the hands of Teliakovsky, a reactionary of little taste.

Two men disagree, a director tries to admonish a *ballerina* and fails, very trivial everyday occurrences but with far-reaching consequences that the individuals could not for a moment have foreseen. The Russian Imperial Ballet could continue with Diaghileff outside, but he was to take the inspiration and the major development with him.

At the time of these happenings ballet outside of Russia was dormant, there were good dancers but that is all. Ballet at the Paris Opéra, its great home of yesterday, was merely a pleasing rest from the more serious business of opera, the male dancer scarcely existed and women performed male roles *en travesti*. In London ballet was popular at the Empire, well enough danced, but in no sense an art for the sensitive or the musical. In both these capitals it could not be compared with the Russian ballet from which Fokine had revolted, either in

extent or artistry. In importing ballet Diaghileff had to revive a name that had no goodwill, that interested but a handful and that excited the scorn of most intellectuals who were just able to sit through the ballet in *Faust*. Ballet meant for a few *le foyer de la danse*, for the masses pretty girls, light music, chatter, an evening off. Within a year of appearing in each capital Diaghileff had completely reversed the position. The finest musicians, the finest painters thought in terms of the new medium, Karsavina and Nijinsky rivalled any opera singer in popularity and the intellectual or pseudo-intellectual adopted ballet without a trace of condescension.

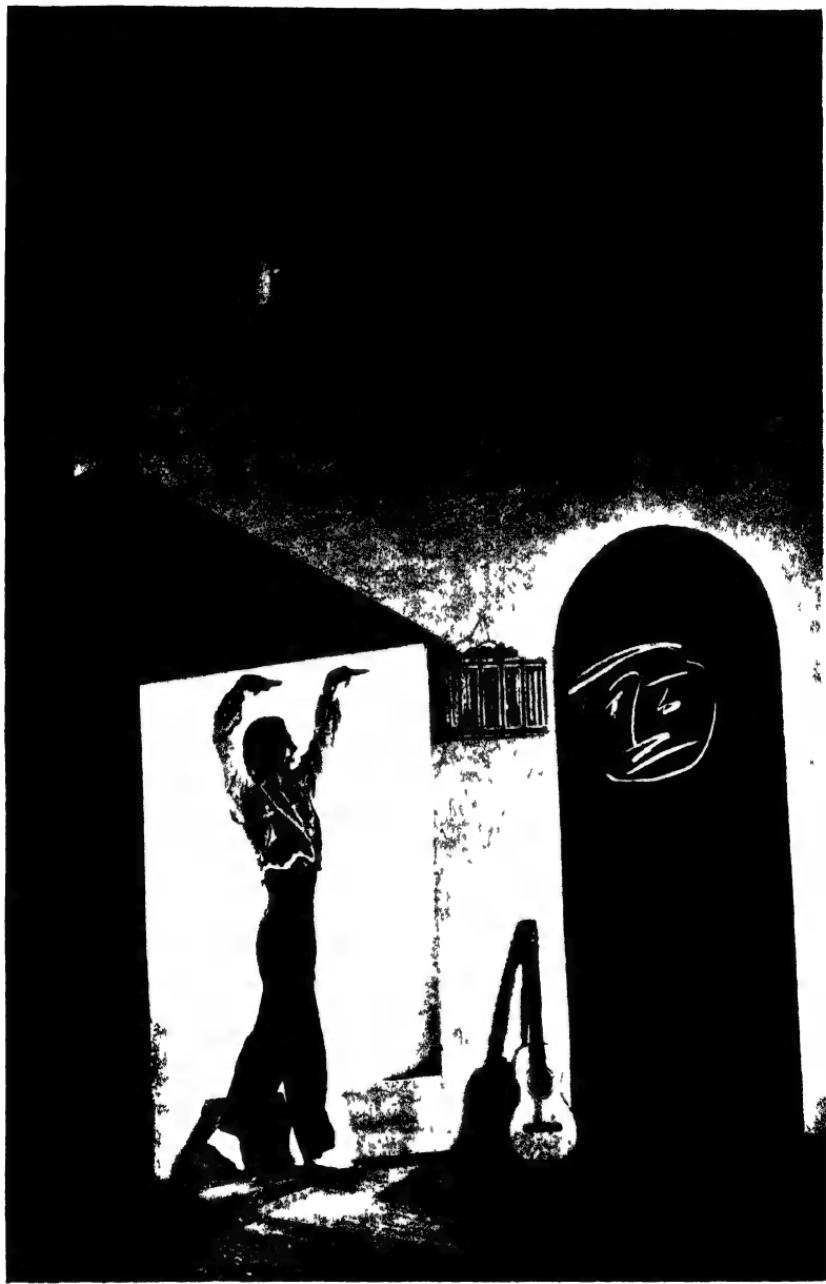
The reasons for this were many; certainly as much the sudden renewal of contact with the main tradition as the Fokine-Diaghileff reforms. It is interesting to note that *Prince Igor*, to this day never omitted from any repertoire, was by far the most popular work.

Dancing as we have seen started as an essentially male art, women at first did not participate and even as late as the early nineteenth century Vestris was *le dieu de la danse* and Mlle Lany, the finest dancer of the day described as "presqu'à la force de Vestris". The man still set the standard. It was only in the romantic period that the man completely lost his status. We have heard Gautier's disgust at male dancers and noted the exception that he made in the case of Perrot described as a male Taglioni! Man soon degenerated into a mere *porteur* and finally in some countries disappeared altogether. In Russia this was never altogether the case, and it is a common misapprehension to credit the recovery of male prestige to Diaghileff and the supremacy of Nijinsky, though this did turn the balance. Petipa made his greatest creations for women but the Maryinsky always had its full equipment of men many of whom made their name, quite apart from their ability as partners. Serge Legat, before he committed suicide made a

great reputation in Russia as a coming dancer, Karsavina's father and Kchesinska's father had big names and Nijinsky himself was famous from his schooldays many years before he joined Diaghileff. After Diaghileff's departure Vladimiroff was famed in St. Petersburg, Volinine and Novikoff in Moscow.

It is obviously impossible to have balanced choreography without the male element. It is impossible to show to the full the quality of female movement without the contrast, it is impossible to interpret any interesting music, it is impossible to have any developed dramatic content. The fairy princess must have her cavalier both to lift and to love her.

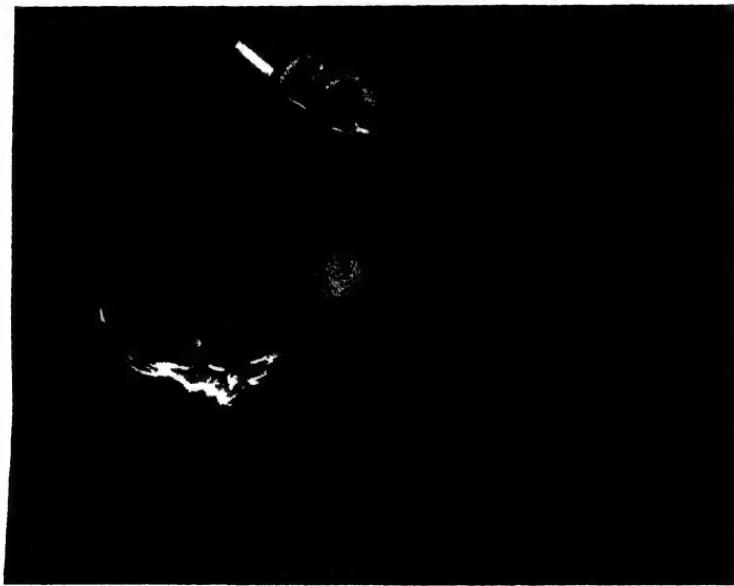
Prince Igor showed a greater quantity of men on the stage than had previously been seen in Western Europe, virile men led by a fine dancer-actor Adolf Bolm who played a very great part in popularising ballet. Also *Prince Igor* was truly Russian and the national aspect of an international art has invariably the strongest appeal. The ballet in its more accepted sense of the word such as *Les Sylphides* had its success too, largely on account of Karsavina and Nijinsky but it was not fully understood for some time until the beautiful and simple dramatic dialogue *Le Spectre de la Rose* had taught the public to distinguish between the toe-dancing they had known and ballet dancing in the sense of the great tradition. *Scheherazade* and *Cleopatra* brought colour and the work of a new artist, Leon Bakst. Where before ballet décor had consisted of pinks and baby blues, frills and ribbons within a built-up set, here was something savagely exciting. It seemed revolutionary but in fact it meant the return of the painter into the partnership, which he should never have left. Immediately previous to Benois and Bakst the ballet decorator was a highly competent craftsman who dressed the finished work, while in the earliest



75 Leonide Massine in *Le Chapeau Tricorne*



77 Georges Balanchine



76 Nijinska

period he had been the best painter that the court had at its disposal, very much a part of the whole. Diaghileff in returning to the best artists of the day was following closely in the footsteps of his great predecessor Louis XIV and for twenty-five years he could truthfully say *Le Ballet c'est moi*. He was the first commoner in a post that had been held by Kings and their viceroys since the days of ancient Rome. He had created a new métier.

To Western Europe he brought in rapid succession two startling musical innovations; the first the creation of ballet to music that had already been accepted on its own merits and later with *L'Oiseau de Feu* and *Petrouchka* original music that had merit even when divorced from the action. In Bakst and Benois he found his Boucher, in Stravinsky his Lully. With the exception of Tchaikovsky's three ballets, *The Swan Lake*, *Casse Noisette* and *The Sleeping Princess* and Glazounov's *Raymonda* and *The Seasons*, ballet music had become little more than an accompaniment.

With Diaghileff's début in Western Europe ballet was nearer to the ideals of Lucian and Noverre than it had been for generations and also, more popular. It had to be when the general public was its main support.

(xiv) *After Fokine*

When Fokine left Diaghileff and Nijinsky assumed his brief reign temporarily the aesthetic of ballet underwent an enormous change. Nijinsky trained in a rigid classicism and as a dancer the most notable exponent of classicism turned his attention to the creation of works that seemed the antithesis of the traditional ballet. Without being altogether successful through insufficient knowledge Nijinsky nevertheless hinted that ballet could enlarge its boundaries. It is interesting, for instance, that

in *Jeux* for the first time for many generations he treated a contemporary subject. We have seen that this was not in itself revolutionary but well supported by precedent. His three ballets revealed to Diaghileff the fact that ballet could succeed by shock and surprise as well as by pleasure. Conservative by taste and tradition he learnt a new method from the scandal and resulting publicity of *l'Après Midi d'un Faune*. But however far ballet may leave its origins it invariably returns and Nijinsky dancing *Spectre de la Rose* or *Les Sylphides* was greater and had more meaning than Nijinsky, choreographer of *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

In Massine Diaghileff found a creator who could follow up Nijinsky's suggestion, enlarge the boundaries of ballet with the minimum of distortion. *La Boutique Fantasque* is purely classical in form, conventional in subject yet with a point of view that had not been exploited. It survives to-day where the Fairy Doll* on the same subject without a Pavlova to give it life is an empty formula. Massine enriched the actual movement available in ballet without in any way departing from the basic tradition. Later with de Basil he proved that tradition could seize hold of the so-called expressionist dance and use it, just as the ballet had exploited folk dancing in the past. His dances created by Verchinina in *Les Présages* and *Chore-arium* are a revelation in that respect. Mary Wigman, a very remarkable personality, if not a great dancer, plays her part in this stage of our story just as Duncan did the generation before, but to a lesser degree. Even Massine's most "revolutionary" ballet for Diaghileff *Le Pas d'Acier* was no real departure from tradition. The work dance had been exploited since the earliest days of the art.

* It is curious when Catherine Littlefield revived *The Fairy Doll* at the Hippodrome, 1937, how many people thought that it was a recent imitation of *La Boutique Fantasque*, many of them self-confessed *balletomanes* at that.

Both Nijinska and Balanchine who succeeded Massine had the strongest possible links with tradition and never departed from it.

The point that I am aiming at is that in spite of cries of revolution and of a breach of tradition, basically ballet remains unchanged. Only in minor points is there a difference. The new choreographer brings a new point of view, uses the old technique in a new way and adds something of himself to it. If he fails to do so, ballet meets with a lean period and the public falls off. Contemporary opera is in this unhappy position, as much for the lack of inspired producers as anything else. Nijinska's *Train Bleu* was one of those allegedly revolutionary works. What actually did it revolt against? Nothing basic, merely the romantic phase of ballet. The subject was topical and satirical and the technique introduced acrobatic movement into the classical dance. All of which had been done before.

The basis of all ballet lies in the schoolroom and all Diaghileff's dancers were the pupils of Cecchetti, pupil of Lepri, pupil of Blasis, etc. That is the important fact. Diaghileff may after the War have written a diatribe against romanticism, hailed the new because it was new, and he may even have believed it at the time, but he never even investigated the possibility of a new technique to express these new ideas. Revolutionary Russia has failed to evolve a new technique in spite of early trials and to-day no longer desires it. The technique of the classical dance is in fact supple enough to be used in any required direction; in drama as in *Petrouchka*, romance *Les Sylphides*, acrobacy and satire *Le Train Bleu*, folk dance *Prince Igor* and *Le Chapeau Tricorne* and so on. There are different conceptions of that technique; the French, the Italian, the Russian and one day there will surely be the English, to the expert those differences are great, but all of them would

be easily recognisable by Carlo Blasis for the art he developed and codified.

What has varied far more is the literary conception behind the ballet. The *littérateur* has a definite place in ballet, a dangerous and difficult role to fulfil. Dangerous because too much in evidence he will mar the whole work and difficult because he shares his role with the musician who also suggests atmosphere. The wrong way and the customary way of creating a ballet in the bad periods immediately pre-Diaghileff for instance was to commission a story from a hack-writer, to commission or arrange some music that was rhythmically fit for dancing, to hand this over to a *maître de ballet* who proceeded to ignore the story and to give to his *ballerina* the type of dances in which she had made her name. Then a costumier would dress and decorate the whole according to his vague notions of the place and time of the action, taking the greatest care, however, to dress everyone in conventional ballet uniform.

That was neither the way of Louis XIV with his Molière, Lully and Beauchamp nor of Diaghileff. An idea would be picked up out of the air so to speak and would then be attacked simultaneously by the various collaborators so that often it would be impossible to assign the initial credit to anyone. The innovator Diaghileff was returning to the origins of ballet for his methods.

(xv) *De Basil and Contemporary Russian Ballet*

The effect of the death of Diaghileff while it was to create English Ballet completely paralysed Russian Ballet for a time. There was a well-trained army but no generalissimo and the army soon melted away in small groups carrying on a species of guerilla ballet. Lifar after a short spell in revue went to the



78 Serge Grigorieff, *régisseur* of Russian Ballet from 1909 to the present day, on tour





80 The Russian Ballet in Hollywood: a Group including Toumanova, Grigorieva, Riabouchinska, Baronova, Massine and Lichine, with Charlie Chaplin and Paulette Goddard





82 The Russian Ballet in mid-Atlantic: a performance of *Le Beau Danube* on the *Normandie*



83 Left to Right: Vera Zorina, Captain Bruce Ottley
and Colonel de Rosil



84 *Left to Right* : Eglevsky, Nemchinova, René Blum,
Hofmekleris and Fokine



85 Rehearsing with Fokine

Paris Opéra, Dolin, Markova and others came to England to take part in the new activities there; a few joined the Pavlova company so soon to be disbanded, and a group under Grigorieff went to Monte Carlo. Twenty-five years' work was scattered in a few weeks, the inevitable result for a company that had no home. The Diaghileff company dissolved just as those small wandering family companies had done in Italy.

The outlook for ballet was desperate. England could not proceed without guidance, though the material was there, Paris was supremely uninterested, Russia was isolated and had missed the main evolution, Denmark had a small flourishing, but strictly local affair, Milan and Rome had forsaken ballet for opera, America was almost hostile. An interval of ten years or more would have destroyed everything, since, as we have seen, no written records count for much in an art whose very strength lies in the fact that it is handed on from person to person.

In ten years living ballet might have died, in a few months no one could revive the Diaghileff company. During the last years it had been his more than ever, his leading dancers were too young to have learnt their lesson well. They still needed his guidance.

In 1930 the Russian opera under the guidance of W. de Basil and Prince Tseretelli came to the Lyceum for a season. It presented a few evenings devoted to ballet that were indifferent artistically but nevertheless very welcome. The company left London and we heard no more of Russian Ballet till July 4, 1933.

Colonel W. de Basil, however, through this brief experience had seen the great demand for ballet and realised that the opportunity had come to form a company. He was not by origin a man of the theatre but a Cossack who had enjoyed an adventurous military career. He was fond of dancing and

began his connection with the theatre by starting a very small ambulant troupe with his wife, and niece. He showed a remarkable flair for his new métier. After his opera experience he turned his entire attention to ballet. There were many others, men of wide experience, ready to take on the task, but they lacked de Basil's driving force and also the ability to start on a new ground, with a new idea.

De Basil did not attempt to revive the Diaghileff Ballet or to collect the scattered dancers. He took with him Serge Grigorieff who had been stage director since 1909, Georges Balanchine as choreographer and a strengthening handful of dancers from the old régime. With René Blum at Monte Carlo, cradle of dancers since 1910, he started a new company. For the majority of his dancers he went to the Paris studios and that is how the pre-Diaghileff dancers play the biggest role in the contemporary dance, linking the emigration with the Imperial Court.

From Kchesinska he took Riabouchinska, Rostova, Tarakanova, from Preobrajenska Toumanova, Baronova, Sidorenko (now Grigorieva) and many others. He found dancers in the studios of Trefilova, Egorova and Volinine. Since he has taken them from Novikoff in America, from Poliakova in Belgrade, Edouardova in Berlin and in England from Marie Rambert.

Thanks to the wide experience of these great dancers the new generation has found technique to be easy and ballet has been able to advance in a virtuoso direction, all the first works, *Cotillon*, *Beau Danube*, *Jeux d'Enfants*, *Concurrence* stressing the *fouetté*. The young dancers lacked stage-craft but compensated for it by instinct. The great change that had come over the dance was the enrolment of so many whose parents had never been connected with the stage. Riabouchinska alone was the daughter of a dancer. The pedigree still existed, a pedigree of tradition but not of blood or environment. This undoubtedly

86 The René Blum Company in *Les Sylphides*



87 Riabouchinska and Massine in *Le Beau Damube*





88 The de Basil Company in *Petrouchka*



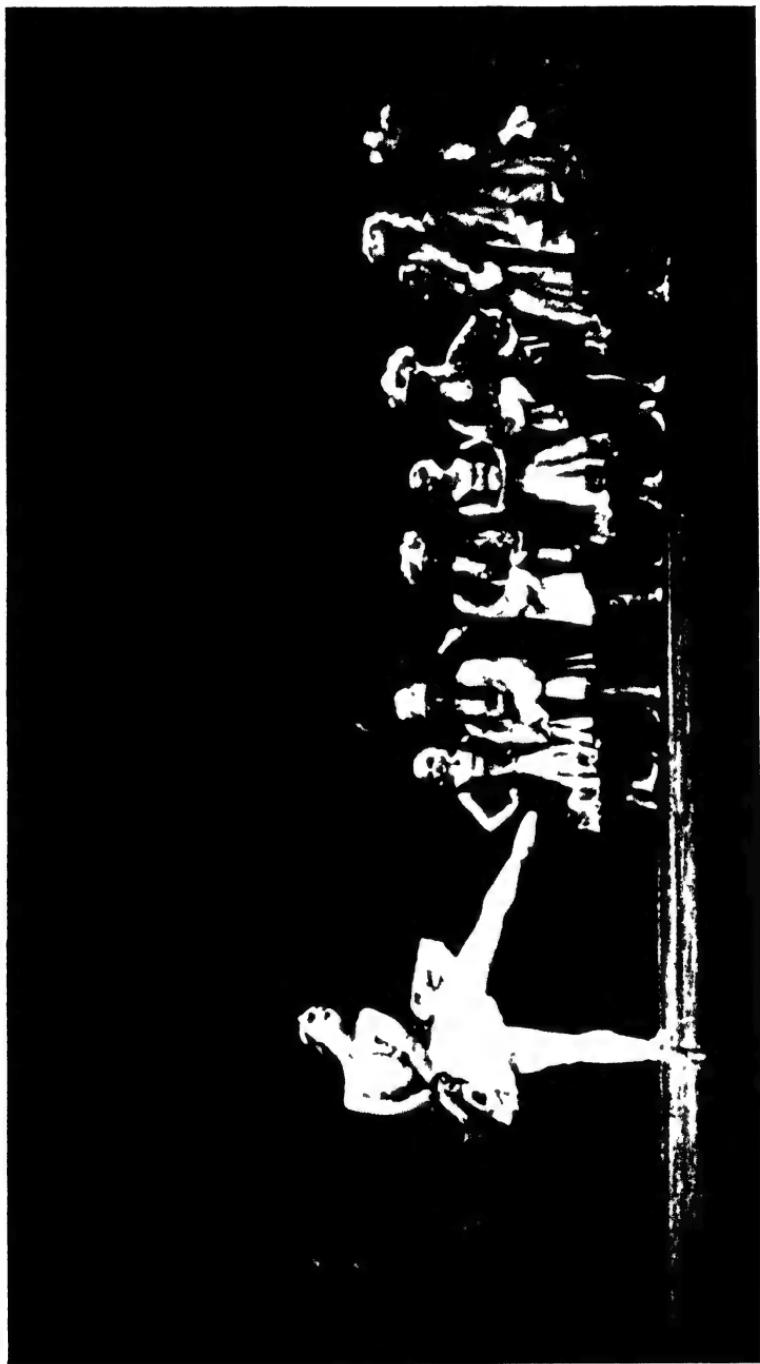
89 The de Basil Company in the First Movement of *Choreartium*



90 Baronova and Massine in the Second Movement of *La Symphonie Fantastique*



91 Irina Baronova in *Papillons*



92 Irina Baronova in *Aurora's Wedding*



93 André Eglevsky in *l'Epreuve d'Amour*



94 The de Basil Company in *Scheherazade*





96, 97 Tamara Toumanova in *Aurora's Wedding*





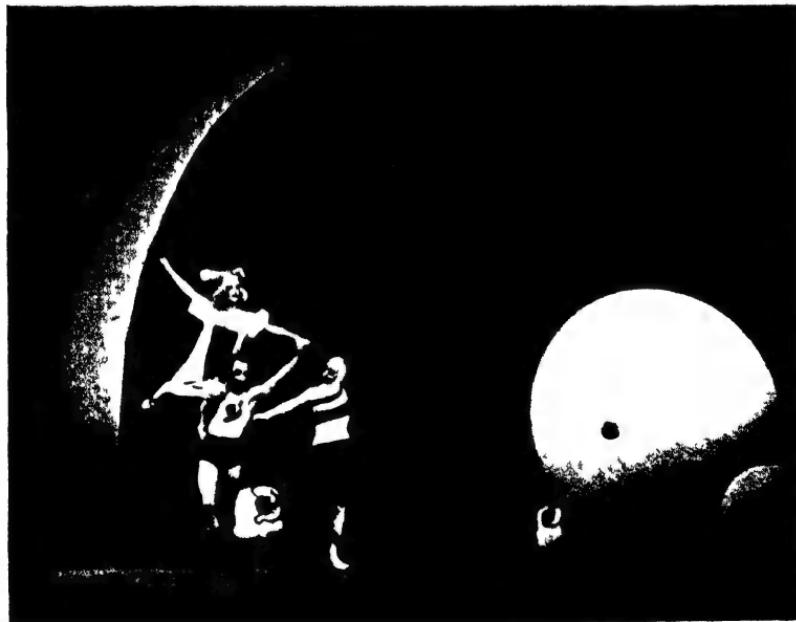
96, 97 Tamara Toumanova in *Aurora's Wedding*



98 Irina Baronova in *Le Coq d'Or*



99 The Last Movement of *Choreartum*, danced by
the de Basil Ballet



100 *Jeux d'Enfants*, danced by the de Basil Ballet



101 *Cent Baisers* : Tamara Tchinarova



102 A Dressing-room at Covent Garden



103 Make-up : Mark Platoff as Malatesta in

104 'The Polish Ballet in *The Legend of Cracow*



gave a fresh outlook and a contact with humanity that has been able to convince a wide new public.

Its drawback is the same as Diaghileff's, the lack of a permanent home which makes itself felt still more since the young dancers have not had sufficient time to be really well grounded. This may not be strongly noticeable at the present moment but it will become so when the turn of the young dancers arrives to hand on their art to others.

It is interesting that under de Basil Alexandra Danilova, last of the dancers grounded in the old manner, has continually developed in artistry and this must be attributed to the grounding she received.

In aesthetic the new Russian Ballet has not departed very far from the old, the majority of whose repertoire it carries. It has restored youth to an organisation that was weary in spirit, that recourse in its weariness to momentary sensations that could not endure. In this manner it has increased its public.

The symphonic ballets do not in any sense mark the beginnings of a new school or aesthetic, save that through them Massine has enlarged the repertoire of movement. They remain isolated experiments though fundamentally they fit into the tradition we have discussed. Even the pure abstraction of *Choreartium* has its precedent but it can clearly never point the direction of the future. The most complete works of the company *Cotillon* and *Jeux d'Enfants* for all their modern garb are a part of the whole that is ballet. They express their time as every great work must. The tendency has been a return to the purest classicism and an absolute banishing of the many distortions that were creeping into the dance.

To-day de Basil who has acquired the repertoire of Diaghileff and Pavlova holds in his hands the history of the past and the possibilities of the future, until such time as national movements have absorbed enough tradition to stand

alone and even then they will need the stimulus of a company that travels to prevent a too great insularity.

A knowledge of the history of the past will prevent the nauseating habit of condemning the future in its name. Ballet is a closed family circle, but it expresses the spirit of its age and surroundings. The majority of yesterday's genii, the corseted dancers, would in reality amuse us to-day, though we might applaud the exceptional individual. Ballet, the theatre, is not by its very nature enduring like painting or sculpture save in its basic principles. That which it strives to express, and even its technique, changes with the years.

This whole sketch is a tribute to yesterday, but soon to-day will be yesterday likewise, and that is the only spirit in which it should be understood.

The man who uses Diaghileff to damn de Basil and the Tsar to damn them both, neither loves nor understands the art. A study of its history would show him that his age, the age that he uses to condemn a new era that he cannot grasp, is but one small fragment in a constantly developing and changing scene.



106 Ladre and Borovansky in
Le Lion Amoureux

Make-up



105 Platooff in *Francesca da Rimini*

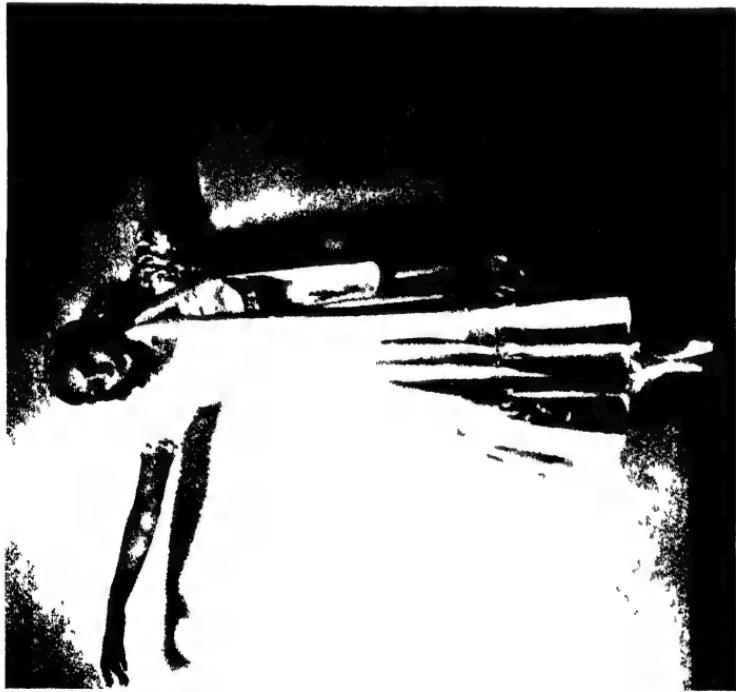


107, 108 Two Studies of Tamara Toumanova

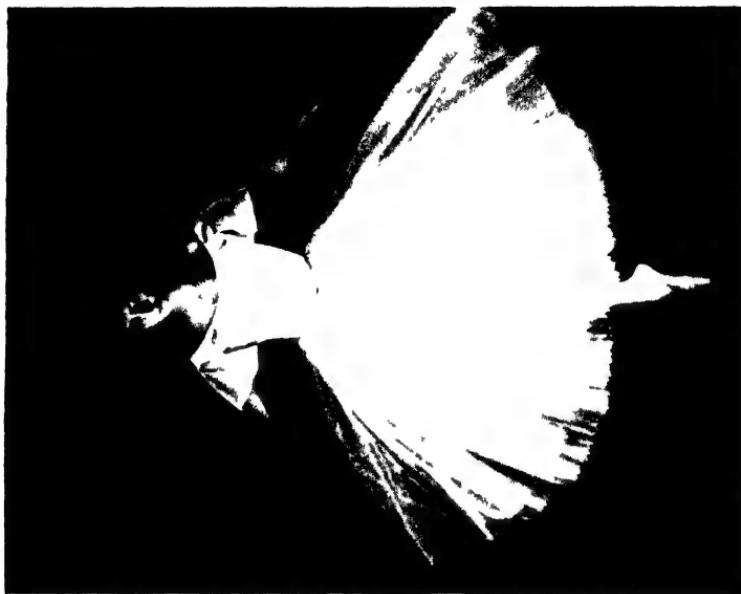




110 Tatiana Riabouchinska in *Le Spectre de la Rose*



109 Tamara Toumanova in *Le Spectre de la Rose*



112 Olga Spessivtzeva



111 Alice Markova in *Giselle*



113 Irina Baronova and Mark Platoff in
La Symphonie Fantastique



114 Irina Baronova and Paul Petroff
in *Les Sylphides*



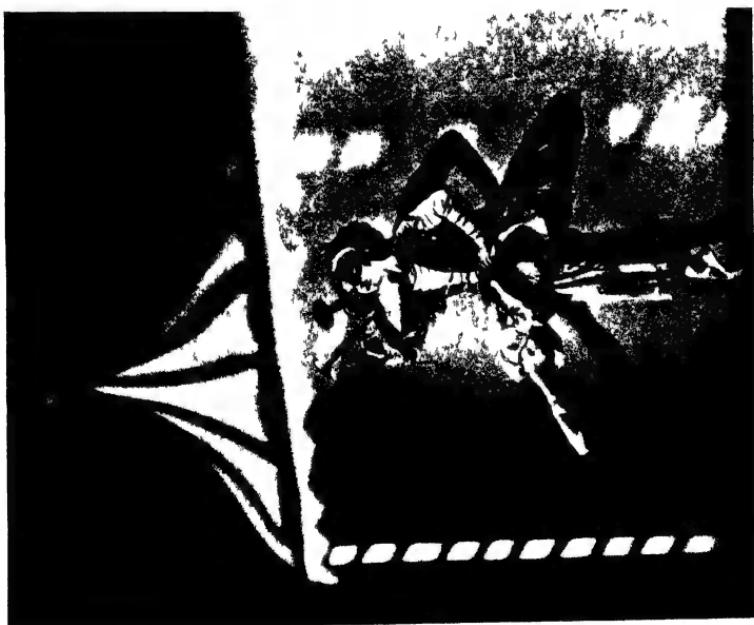
116 Lubov Tchernichieva in *Le Chapeau
Tucome*



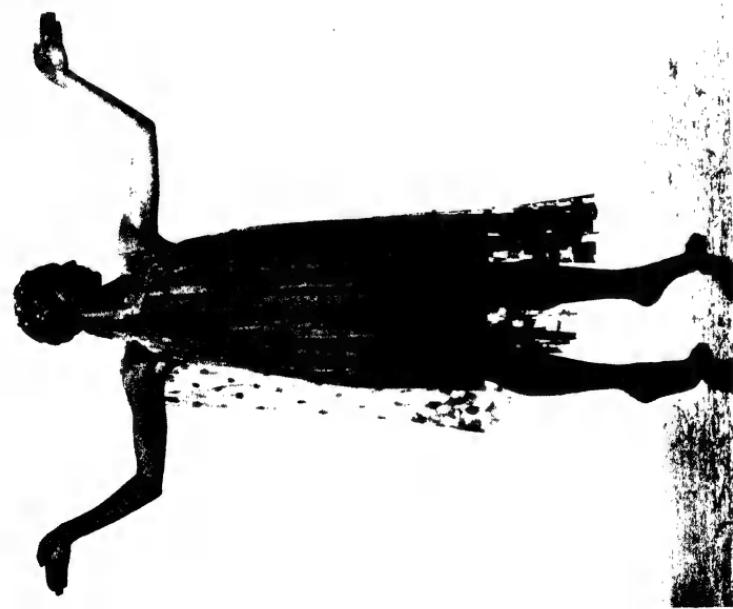
115 Alexandra Danilova in *Soleil de
Minuit*



118 Nathalie Leslie in *Le Spectre de la Rose*



117 Nina Yarakanova in *Petrouchka*



119 Tamara Grigorieva in *l'Après Midi d'un Faune*



120 Olga Morosova in *Cimarosiana*



122 Yurek Shabelevsky in *Petrouchka*



121 Irina Baronova in *Petrouchka*



123 David Lichine in *l'Apres Midi d'un Faune*



124 Serge Lifar in *Giselle*



125 Robert Helpmann in *Giselle*

PART FOUR

The Birth of Ballet in England and America

“Never become a dramatic critic, you will run the risk of hardening your heart and of looking coldly at what I have created with so much enthusiasm.”

Auguste Bournonville

(i) In England: Sowing the Seed

THE pattern of ballet in England is an interesting one which it would have been impossible to trace before 1930, save as the history of an ever generous audience to visiting foreign artists, many of whom made their headquarters here. From 1930 until the present the development has been exceedingly rich, even when narrated as a dry account of fact without any of the enthusiasm and optimism that actuality brings with it. To-day for the first time in its world history the ballet is indigenous in this country.

Ballet in England in early days took the form of a masque, a combination of drama, song, music and dance which reached great heights of poetry, music and design during the Elizabethan age and which died with Merrie England, a death so absolute that England remains the one country in the world where the folk dance has had to be artificially revived, a work which is being done with extraordinary skill by the English Folk Dance Society under the guidance of Douglas Kennedy.

It has often been argued that the artificial revival of the Folk Dance is an impossibility, and superficially there may seem something a little comical in sedate business men and women rather self-consciously performing the dances of their ancestors in a specially designed costume and in the Albert Hall or some other parish hall instead of on the village green, long since become a roadhouse. Apart from the fact that they very obviously enjoy it, ample justification in itself, this work is of the greatest value and will be of increasing importance as time goes on. It has created a living museum of national music and dance movement which will be invaluable to the English choreographer and which can give his work the national basis which it lacks. In the past there has been a stupid hostility between the Folk movement and ballet due to a mis-understanding of ballet and the use of "the points" in particular. This does not exist at the present day and ballet dancers should realise that there is a mine of information to be had at Cecil Sharp House. The international Festival of Dancing organised by the E.F.D.S. and held at Regent's Park and the Albert Hall was of historic importance and while the English contribution was stiff and lacking in spontaneity compared with the true peasantry of other countries it was a step in the right direction.

After the *Merrie England* period the English became the least chauvinistic and the most responsive audience in the world, a position they have retained until the present day. All the foreign celebrities visited London in turn; Guimard was acclaimed at Covent Garden.* Didelot produced at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, between 1796-1800, Carlo Blasis at the

* La Guimard wrote from London in 1784 when she was appearing at Covent Garden: "Since I am in this town they have not left me alone for a moment. I am overwhelmed with attentions from all the noble ladies especially the Duchess of Devonshire. . . . The manner in which I am received everywhere is so flattering it might well turn a less balanced head."

same theatre in 1826, but, it is important to note, without the same effect as in Russia which gave them such unlimited material to develop. Here they left us with nothing but a legend. Elssler visited London in 1834 before her Paris début and in 1845 London saw the great *Pas de Quatre* (Taglioni, Cerrito, Grisi and Grahn) at the express request of the young Queen Victoria. There were of course English dancers too, the most celebrated being Adeline Plunkett and the ill-fated Clara Webster who died from burns received on the stage at Covent Garden in 1844, but the English dancer was an exception, and made little headway abroad.

After the golden age of the Romantic Ballet there was a lull everywhere in Western Europe, though later ballet became a popular form of light entertainment at the Alhambra and the Empire. Katti Lanner was a big figure in the eighties, Cecchetti and Legnani both visited this country, but from contemporary accounts we can see that while the dancing reached a high standard the productions had departed a very long way from the ideals preached by Noverre and Blasis.

In 1897 Adeline Genée, a Dane brought up by her uncle Alexandre in the Bournonville tradition, made her début at the Empire and was the big figure in English dancing for well over a decade. Her influence on the future has been greater than anyone else's during the Empire period. Countless people had their introduction to ballet through her and the memory of her artistry, quite apart from her many present-day activities, has been a great example and of invaluable propagandist force.

In 1908 Lydia Kyasht was the first of the Russians to make her headquarters here and Anna Pavlova followed her in 1910, appearing (with a small company) at the Palace. Phyllis Bedells became the first English *ballerina* of note at the Empire in 1909, too early for a dancer of her abilities.

It was the arrival of the Diaghileff company, in 1911, that started the new vogue of ballet considered as a serious art, it also made the position of the English dancer *as an English dancer* impossible until his death.

“The repercussions of the Diaghileff Ballet on English University youth,” said Jacques Emile Blanche, “are scarcely believable. The influence of these performances is ceaseless on all intellectual activity in England.”

But England was learning and English dancers taking their place almost unnoticed in Russian companies.

Pavlova had filled her company with English dancers for a variety of reasons. She believed in their aptitude, she admired their discipline after endless trouble between her compatriots and the Poles, also, it became impossible to borrow dancers from the Imperial Theatres for the long tours she undertook. Although they retained for the most part their English names (Butsova *née* Boot was an exception) they could not attract much attention. Pavlova and Pavlova alone was the great attraction. Since her death a few have taken their part in the general activity,* Muriel Stuart one of the originals and entirely her pupil being a pillar of the American Ballet.

In the Diaghileff Ballet they existed too, but in heavy disguise. Sokolova (Munnings) the greatest so far of all English dancers considered as an artist of dramatic expression, made a great reputation in competition with the finest Russian dancers, Vera Savina (Clarke), Eleanora Marra and others added their share to the reputation of *Russian Ballet*. It was only with the arrival of Anton Dolin as *premier danseur* that the presence of English dancers became generally known, and then it was very greatly exaggerated.

* Algeranoff and Tresahar are with de Basil, Cathleen Crofton has been with Markova-Dolin and many schools the world over have been started by former Pavlova dancers.—A. L. H.



126 Adeline Genée in *Robert the Devil*, at the Empire Theatre



127 *Job*, at Sadler's Wells



128 *The Dumb Girl's Discourse*, at Sadler's Wells

Seraphine Astafieva was the first of the Russians to start a school in London. Trained at St. Petersburg, sister-in-law of the great Kchesinska and a member of the Diaghileff company she attracted considerable attention through her beauty in such roles as *Cleopatra* and the dances from *Prince Igor*. She was an inspiring teacher who did much to spread the tradition of Russian teaching. One of her pupils Patrick Kay had danced under the name of Patrikoeff in the *corps de ballet* of *The Sleeping Princess* in 1921, three years later under the name of Anton Dolin he returned as the first English *premier danseur* of a Russian or for that matter of any foreign company. He was followed by another Astafieva pupil, Alicia Marks, who became Markova and who danced many important roles.

These two may in a sense be called the last of the Anglo-Russian dancers, although English dancers will always appear in Russian companies. Their example has had an outstanding effect, and has given us a national self-confidence that was sadly lacking.

Nicolas Legat also settled in London giving his pupils the pure Russian school.

When Diaghileff died in 1929, followed by Pavlova in 1931 English ballet had its first big chance. There was a large audience waiting to be satisfied, no distressing comparisons to be made and a number of well-trained dancers out of work.

(ii) *Reaping the Harvest*

English Ballet was born in the interim between the death of Diaghileff, 1929, and the arrival of de Basil, 1933.

Three bodies and a number of individuals played their share in this, acting in the dark at first to supply an immediate want rather than to build on solid foundations for the future.

Ballet activity was paralysed by the death of Diaghileff.

Dancers everywhere were waiting for a lead and the critics, especially in France, predicted the demise of ballet.

In October 1929 P. J. S. Richardson, editor of the *Dancing Times* and an active organiser to whom ballet is greatly indebted, and Arnold L. Haskell had a discussion* as to the future of ballet which led to the invitation of a number of enthusiasts to a series of meetings. On Feb. 16th 1930 the Camargo Society† was introduced to a large gathering at the Metropole Hotel and its first performance was given at the Cambridge Theatre before a subscription audience on Sunday, Oct 19th.

Pomona with music by Constant Lambert and choreography by a young Englishman, Frederick Ashton, danced by an all-English company with the exception of Anna Ludmila, American, was favourably received.

“It may well prove to be a historic occasion,” wrote C. B. Mortlock in the *Daily Telegraph*, the only critic to see so far ahead. The second production showed Frederick Ashton’s *Façade* to music by William Walton and was an immediate popular success. The third production with Ninette de Valois’ *Job* to music by Vaughan Williams was the greatest success of all and firmly established the name of the Society.

Each one of these productions was in a different vein and all have survived. In June 1932 the Society held a month’s season at the Savoy Theatre with Spessiva and Markova as

* This discussion took place in a restaurant called Chez Taglioni.—
A. L. H.

† Its General Committee was:

Edwin Evans, chairman and musical director.

Lydia Lopokova, choreographic director.

Arnold Haskell, art director.

A. H. Tysser succeeded by J. M. Keynes, Treasurer.

Phyllis Bedells.

P. J. S. Richardson; with M. Montagu-Nathan, Secretary.

129 A Setting for *Apparitions*, by Cecil Beaton





130 A Setting for *Apparitions*, by Cecil Beaton

ballerinas, Anton Dolin as *premier danseur* and a young all-English company.

The Camargo Society encountered endless difficulties financial and artistic. The company was elastic and had to be borrowed for each occasion which made continuity an impossibility, and productions prepared for one or two performances alone became prohibitive in price. When the Society ceased its activities it had not only accomplished its purpose and provided the only serious ballet since the death of Diaghileff, it had laid the foundations of a national ballet. Thanks to the wizardry of J. M. Keynes it was miraculously out of debt.

If I have started with the Camargo Society, it is only because from a publicity point of view it was the big event and its public was a large one. The Society had no permanent headquarters or company of its own, and owed its being to the two groups who have planted the roots of English Ballet.

Marie Rambert, a pupil of Jacques Dalcroze, was attached to the Diaghileff Ballet to teach his methods and especially to help develop Nijinsky along these lines for his *Sacre du Printemps*. There she came under the influence of Cecchetti and became a serious student of ballet technique.

She opened a school in London in 1920 and ten years later gave a first matinée at the Lyric, Hammersmith, that was far more than a pupil show. During the lifetime of Diaghileff it was obvious that the star pupils were intended for his company. They were Pearl Argyle, Prudence Hyman, Andrée Howard, Diana Gould, Maude Lloyd, Harold Turner and William Chappell; names that recur in every English ballet activity and pioneers who never assumed Russian disguises.

Frederick Ashton started his training comparatively late under Leonide Massine for a time, as a pupil of Marie Ram-

bert's and under Nijinska in Ida Rubinstein's company.* He showed a marked aptitude for choreography, making a first success with Warlock's *Capriol Suite*. Pavlova greatly admired his talent and had she lived he would have produced for her.

In 1930 Marie Rambert and her husband Ashley Dukes founded The Ballet Club as a headquarters and a nursery for her young company which could be expanded for West End seasons or merged into the Camargo Society. This first building, small as it was, gave a sense both of permanence and continuity and a very high level of performance was maintained, the only non-Rambert pupil being Alicia Markova, well to the fore in all three activities. The Ballet Club has played a role out of all proportion to its size.

The other important figure in the birth of English Ballet is Ninette de Valois. Also a pupil of Cecchetti, she joined the Diaghileff Ballet in 1924 as a small soliste and remained for two years. She then left to found her own school and to produce for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and the Festival Theatre in Cambridge. The small company she gathered around her was an invaluable nucleus for the Camargo Society and out of it has arisen what is the national ballet of England, the Vic-Wells company, a part of the late Lilian Baylis' remarkable organisation.

The Company started with the Anglo-Russians Markova and Dolin who gave it a high standard of execution and wide publicity and when they left to form their own company has carried on with dancers of its own creation,† save for Pearl

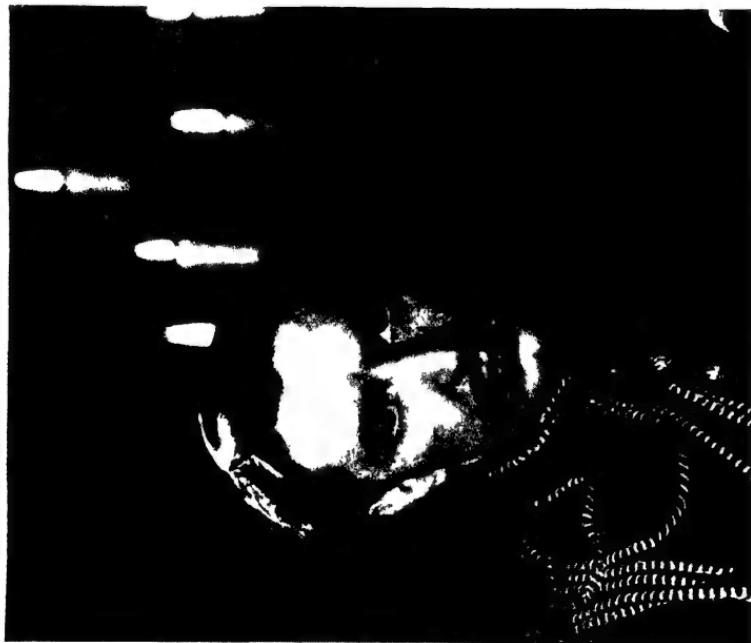
* This company which gave a few isolated performances, but which rehearsed sometimes as much as six months for them plays a considerable part.

There Ashton, Lichine, Shabelevsky, Verchinina, Morosova and others had their first contact with Nijinska and Massine.—A. L. H.

† Their names must be mentioned since they are pioneers: Elizabeth Miller, June Brae, Pamela May, Mary Honer, Joy Newton, Gwyneth Mathews, Molly Brown, as well as others whom I have mentioned in the text.—A. L. H.



132 Ninette de Valois



131 Frederick Ashton in *Apparitions*

134 Marie Rambert



133 Lilian Baylis



Argyle, the first English *ballerina* of maturity and a pioneer. Frederick Ashton joined the company as choreographer and to-day it is truly representative of the state of the art in England, the first company to perform at popular prices, and so to complete the democratisation of ballet.

Another pioneer has been Constant Lambert, who was associated with the Diaghileff company as the composer of *Romeo and Juliet* and who has been musical director of the Camargo Society and the Vic-Wells since the start.

The strength of the Ballet Club and the Vic-Wells, each in its own field, lies not only in the co-operation that they are giving to one another, but in the fact that school and company are attached. With headquarters of their own they possess advantages unknown to any touring ballet.

It is interesting to examine the pedigree of a few members of the Vic-Wells ballet. Margot Fonteyn its *ballerina* studied with Astafieva but mainly at the Wells, Ursula Moreton, dancer and assistant ballet mistress was with Diaghileff, and was entirely a pupil of Cecchetti's, Robert Helpmann one of its leading male dancers comes from Australia where he came under the influence of Pavlova. There is no need to trace the source of the inspiration any further. English ballet will never deny its Russian origins.

It is not yet possible to talk of a definite English school. We have seen the length of time and the combination of circumstances that produced a Russian school. The Russian school is still the system aimed at by our teachers, and wisely since a national growth can neither be forced nor fostered by design. There are, however, certain well-marked tendencies in the dancing. The English school will not favour pure classicism or dancing for the sake of dancing. Its line will be the *ballet d'action* and the Anglo-Saxon forte in the dance is for characterisation and mime. The most typical and successful works

have been *Job*, *The Rake's Progress*, *Façade*, *Les Patineurs*, the romantic *Apparitions*, *Horoscope*, and *Wedding Bouquet*, with the exception of *Apparitions* and *Les Patineurs* all by English composers. No company could have performed these works better, but in the classics and Fokine revivals while the execution has been neat, excellent even in patches, it cannot yet be compared with its creators *at their best*. It lacks the brilliance and finish even if step by step it might be more accurate.

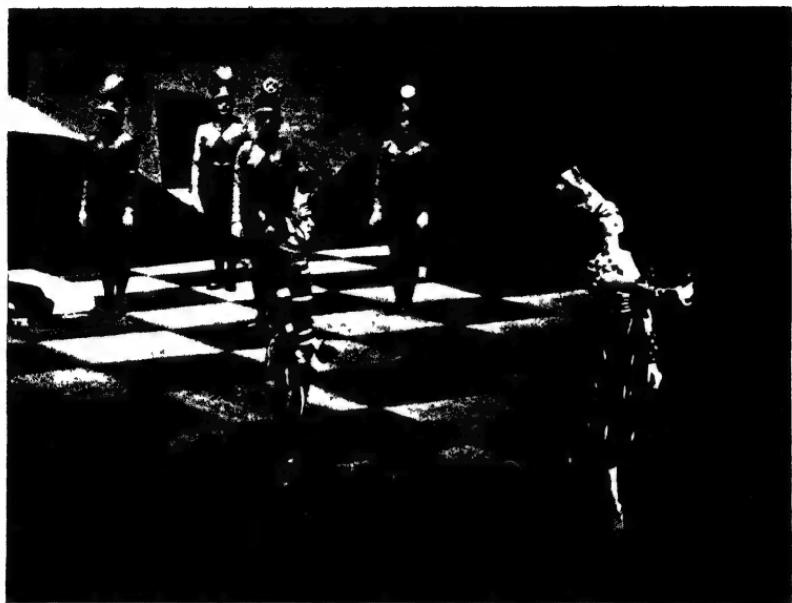
Apart from these active organisations there are many dance studios and associations performing more or less useful work. Their tendency, however, there are eight or ten obvious exceptions, is more commercial than artistic. They are for the most part training teachers to teach girls to become teachers, instead of typists or shopgirls, and while they ensure a certain average they are too far outside the great tradition to play any large role. Ballet, it is worth repeating again, is very strictly a family affair. Our own very young ballet is as I have shown a direct branch of the family.

In England as in no other country it is possible to divide the dancing world into trade and art. The trade is a very flourishing one, but is altogether outside the art. The whole history of dancing shows that steps are only of relative importance and that it is impossible to be a great teacher of dancing, though it is possible to be conscientious and accurate, without first being an experienced, perhaps even a great dancer. It does not of course follow that a great dancer is of necessity a great teacher.

There is at the present moment an over production of trade dancers as against theatre dancers, partly no doubt because there are not enough organisations to absorb good dancers. But the time may come when the trade through diluting the tradition swamps the art. It is now more than ever valuable to seek a training of tradition in the short period when the



135 A Scene from *The Rake's Progress*, at Sadler's Wells



136 June Brae as the Black Queen in *Checkmate*,
at Sadler's Wells





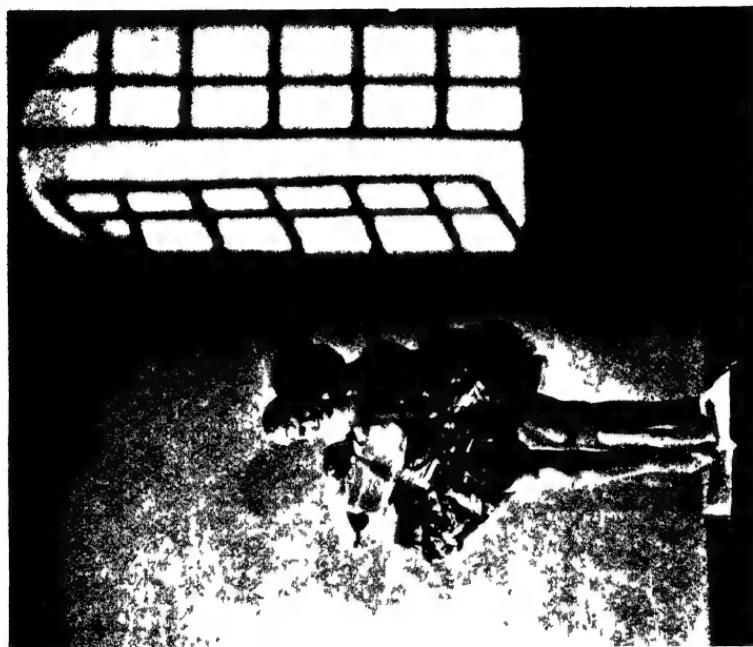
138 Elizabeth Miller and Harold Turner in a Spanish
Dance from *Caravan*



139 Pearl Argyle in *Swan Lake*



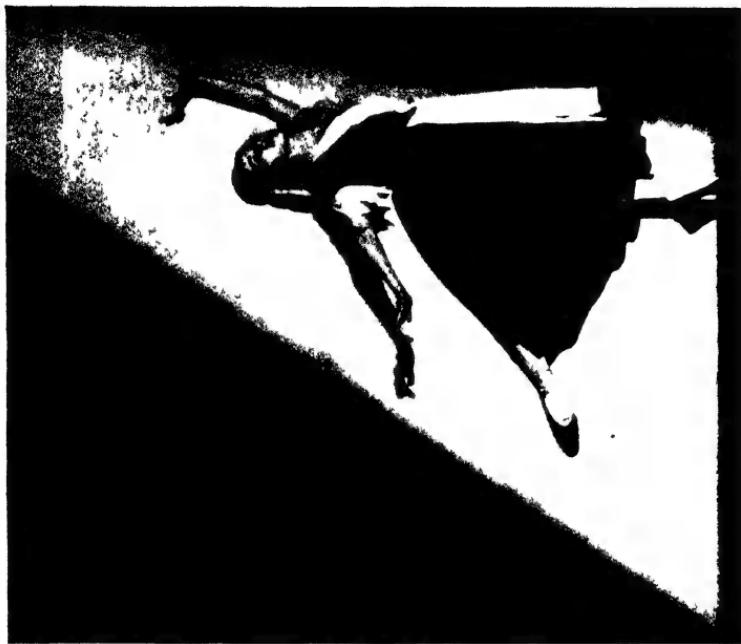
140 Margot Fonteyn in *Pomona*



142 Elizabeth Miller in *Coppélia*



141 Pamela May in *Le Baiser de la Fée*



144 Mary Honer in *The Rake's Progress*

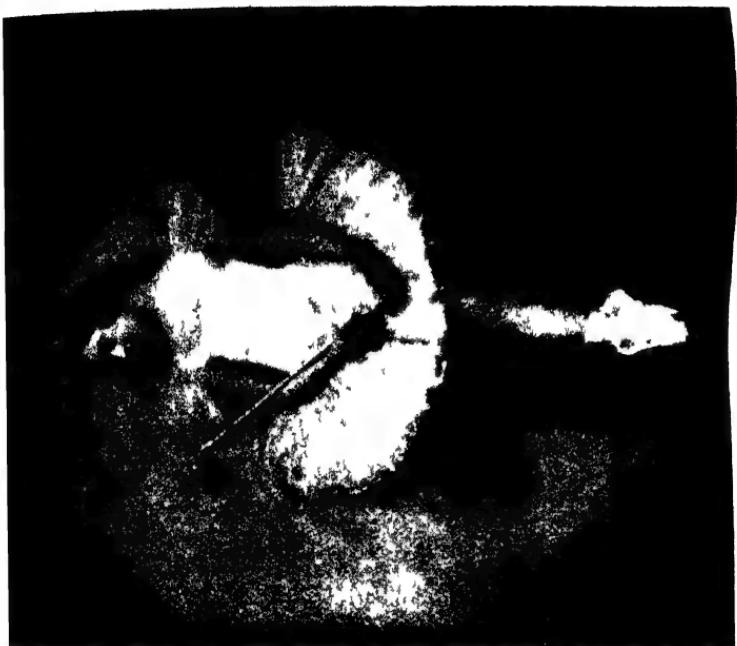


143 Harold Turner in *Checkmate*



145 Harold Turner in *Casse Noisette*

48 Second Generation : Jean Bedells



147 Phyllis Bedells





149 The Family from the South in *Terminal*, danced
by the Philadelphia Ballet

dancers of yesterday are still the teachers of to-day, before the link becomes diluted or difficult to trace.

Meanwhile it is an encouraging sign that for the first time a Russian company has had to look to England for a choreographer and Frederick Ashton is to produce for de Basil. Yet another landmark in the long wanderings of the ballet.

(iii) *In America*

In America the contact with tradition, even from an audience point of view, is far more recent than in England, though America has preserved many of those folk dances that we have lost.

From the time of the Romantic ballet many of the great dancers have visited America and Fanny Elssler in particular made a triumphant tour. But the success of Jenny Lind turned the attention of the public more in the direction of opera, and while such dancers as Genée and especially Anna Pavlova were known and loved, their success was personal and did not include a cult for ballet itself.

The Diaghileff Ballet visited the United States on two occasions, but once again Nijinsky was the star attraction and not the art as a whole.

However, these visits were of importance as they taught the Russians the way to a new country and an astonishing number settled there; Adolf Bolm, Theodore Kosloff, Michael Mordkin, Simenov and greatest of all Michael Fokine. But America was not yet prepared, also it was boom time and the Russians settled down to make comfortable fortunes. At the famous Metropolitan, New York, the progress of ballet was blocked by an old fashioned régime.

Ballet began to mean nothing but vaudeville and presentation numbers in movie houses, sometimes well arranged by Fokine,

Massine and others, but always in a hurry and on troupes of dancers trained only in mechanical sense, able mainly to turn without end, often unable to rise an inch from the ground. This damaged the names not only of the Russians but of their art. Ballet meant legs, high kicking, a diversion for the tired business men. There were admirable American dancers but they found no outlet and were forced to specialise in one or two sensational tricks for which they were very highly paid.

Those who loved the dance followed Duncan and not ballet, and especially Ruth St. Denis who founded a whole school of American dancing of which Martha Graham and Doris Humphreys are notable examples.

This was the position when de Basil brought his company to the St. James's Theatre in 1933. He had to fight not only a natural prejudice but the scepticism of his own countrymen who had tried to start something themselves and failed.

At the same time ballet enthusiasts were starting an American Ballet under the direction of Georges Balanchine and taught by Vilzak, Schollar, Vladimoff and others with the great tradition. The conspicuous success for five years of de Basil has made this movement and others into a possibility and has forced the Metropolitan to open its doors to the American Ballet. It is too early to say what the American Ballet will accomplish, at present it seems to have imposed a rather weary late Diaghileff programme on its fresh young dancers without a brilliant result. But it is unfair to attempt a judgment on its ultimate value.

De Basil has taken nearly a dozen American dancers into his company under Russian names and eventually they will scatter and spread the influence, just as the English dancers with Diaghileff have done. One of them, Dorothie Littlefield has joined her sister Catherine Littlefield, a very talented choreographer, who has formed an all-American company,

The Philadelphia Ballet, which, though less mature, is working on very much the same lines as our Sadler's Wells.

To-day ballet has taken a firm root in America and the next few years will decide its exact position. If it can avail itself of the Russian dancers settled there so as to have a solid groundwork it will prosper rapidly, for the American has an altogether exceptional aptitude for ballet, natural grace and more than her share of good looks. Where before she has concentrated on tricks to-day she needs a complete dance education. There is a wealth of material in America which can give ballet its indispensable national basis, other civilisations which can be digested and absorbed. If the wealthy American is prepared to help his own (the wealthy Englishman is not) progress should be exceptionally rapid.

(iv) *The Lesson of History*

The lesson of history and, if this sketch has any value, it consists of the moral that can be deduced, tells us that, if these national movements are to be a success, the dancer must not neglect a wide general education. That is also the lesson for the contemporary Russian Ballet. If a new school of choreographers is to arise it can only arise from the classroom and the museum, from a wide and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Who is to succeed Massine, Nijinska, Balanchine and the great Fokine?

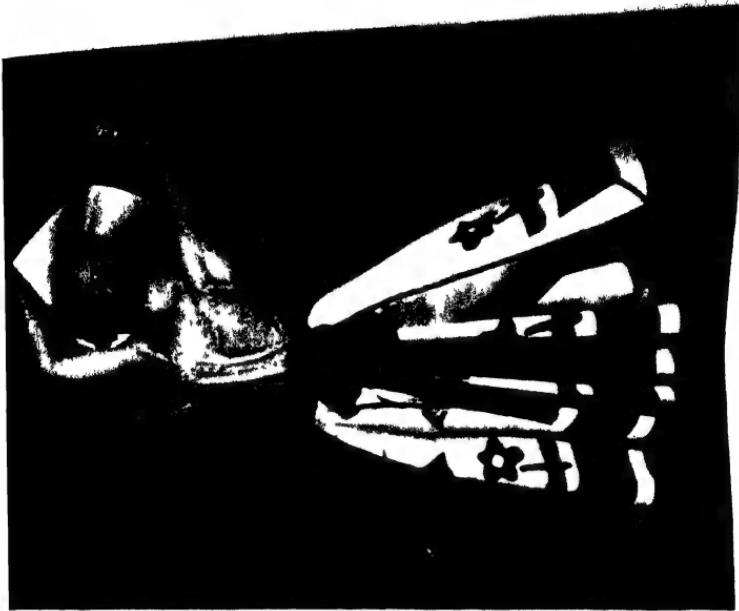
In England the success of de Valois as choreographer and especially as an inspirer has been due to an exceptionally wide erudition. She is the only choreographer to have published a serious work since heroic days. Unless the dancer can acquire culture ballet to-morrow is due for another lean period. To-day it is living in a fool's paradise, prosperous and complacent, on the learning of yesterday.

Another lesson that is implicit in this account is that classicism exists through every change, through romanticism, the new romanticism, cubism, surrealism but that from time to time it needs a great mind to reassess it in terms of the present, to cleanse and to codify it, to take stock of the new technique that has arisen and to use that technique for purposes of dramatic expression. The history of Ballet has been the history of a discovery, its abuse, its assimilation. The present has need of the past as material for what it must express.

Philippe Taglioni exploited romanticism, he himself and others used it till nothing but an empty formula remained. Fokine gave it new life. Nijinsky groped for a ballet outside romanticism, Massine found and developed the answer, abused it himself in an orgy of continuous and frantic movement and was big enough to seek the aid of tradition once again.

Ballet lives from men such as these. Will the present generation give birth to any?

151 Catherine Littlefield as the Film
Star in *Terminal*



150 Nana Gollner in *Le Lac des Cygnes*





152 Dancing on the Movies : Fred Astaire in
A Damsel in Distress

PART FIVE

Voyage into Space

“He flies through the air with
the greatest of ease. . . .”

Popular Song

So far mechanical invention has played no part in the history of ballet. The gramophone has come and enriched singers preserving their voices for future generations, the cinema has done something to acting, either good or bad, whichever way you approach it, but something very positive, so that one can talk of the pre- and post-film period in the drama. It has as yet done nothing for ballet beyond creating a few pleasing patterns and by far the most pleasing patterns of all have come from the brain of Walt Disney, the inventor of a new art form divorced from actuality. This may partly be due to the fact that ballet on the films has never been very seriously tackled. Nijinska's knowledge and talent were used for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* without any worthwhile results, perhaps, because she was not left a free hand, as the problem interested her deeply. In any case ballet on the films has been a failure and will be until it is entrusted to an artist of imagination, the name of Cocteau immediately comes to mind, in which case it will become an entirely new art form depending on camera angles and skilful editing rather than on dancing.

Ballet straight on the screen will never have a future and there are grave objections to its documentary use. Both of these are very positive statements which need examination. The first is more immediately obvious.

The straightforward filming of even a perfect performance is obviously less satisfactory than the thing itself. The thrill of a dancer whose lightness and elevation seem to defy the laws of gravity, the leap through the open window, the leap onto the cushion would have no meaning on the screen which has accustomed us to every type of magic. Imagine a film version even in colour of the "thriller" *Scheherazade*. Close-up effects could be added, the slaughter could be made more realistic, but the depth of the pattern would be lost and the whole thing would be shown up as the rather gruesome melodrama that it basically is. Where the film and dancing have gone hand in hand in an absolute escape from reality is in the films of Fred Astaire, but again the solo work and the duets of this great dancer are alone effective and the big concerted numbers ingeniously enough arranged are a background and a bore. The pattern of swishing skirts and hand-picked beauties is a poor substitute for flesh, blood and muscle. Also, to the keen student of ballet the interest does not lie in frigid perfection but in the shades of difference that go to make up a series of performances. This will doubtless apply to the connoisseur of acting too, but ballet depends even more on personality than the theatre since the actor is produced in movement and forced to speak definite lines, while the dancer though rigidly produced in movement has to rely in the long run on his individual understanding of the music, and mimic in the Noverre-Fokine sense of the word can only be indicated and never really taught.

The use of the film as a document, however, has been constantly hailed as a blessing. There exist very many forms of dance notation that come to us from the very beginnings of ballet. These are practicable up to a point but only in the very simple classical ballets with symmetrical *corps de ballet* design and obvious rhythmic cues. The more complex modern ballet cannot possibly be recorded on paper save as a rough mnemonic



153 Dancing on the Movies : Mia Slavenska in *La Mort du Cygne*



154 Television : Tatiana Riabouchinska in
Le Spectre de la Rose



155 *Casse Noisette*

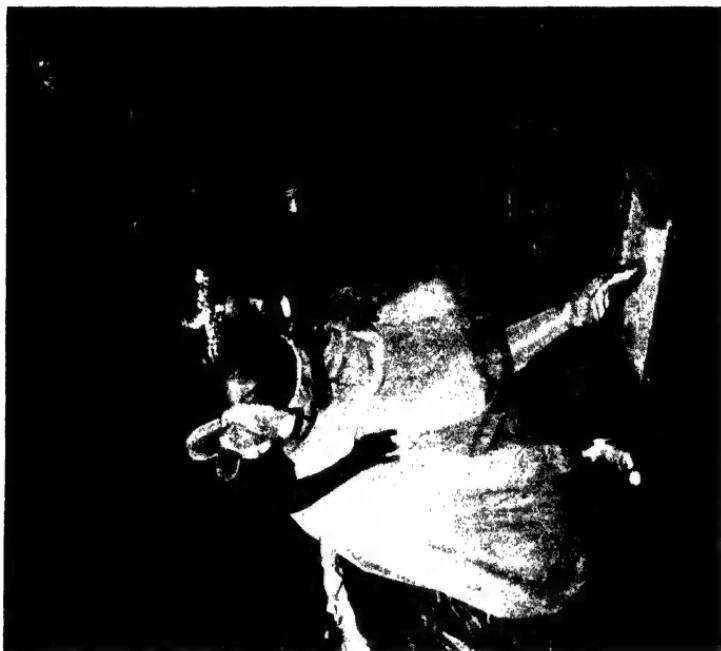


156 *Le Désenraciné*

157 Dancers at Exercise : a painting by Degas



158 The Rosin Box : a photograph of Tatiana Riabouchinska



for the use of the choreographer himself. To take the extreme cases of *Choreartium* or *Les Présages*; neither of these ballets has a *corps de ballet* at all, but a large company in which each member has a difficult role to interpret. Even were such a choreographic score a possibility it would be unwieldy on paper. This is where a strong argument in favour of the film as a recording document arises. How simple, film the ballet once and it exists for ever as it was during its early run! No more hard rehearsals trying to remember it bit by bit, no more gradual changes. There it is, neatly rolled in a small tin box ready for the dancer in far away Buenos Aires or the dancer half a century away. It is amazingly simple, but too simple by far. This whole story has tried to show the meaning and strength of a living tradition. In actual practice the ballet of *Giselle* is alive nearly a hundred years after its creation because it has been handed down from dancer to dancer, and with each new cast it gains a fresh significance. Perform it as it originally was and the result to-day would be something old-fashioned, incongruous. Certainly it would provoke laughter. But do not let us take such an extreme case. Even *Les Sylphides* as performed at the beginning of the century would be most unwelcome to-day. Early photographs are a convincing proof of that statement. And, even if it were welcome with its very remarkable original cast, it would be a caricature when imitated by the dancers of to-day. A film record could preserve *Les Présages* so that Mlle X. and Monsieur Y. could give an admirable imitation in fifty years' time of Baronova and Lichine to-day but in that event the tradition of ballet, which has been a living force since the time of Louis XIV would be a dead thing, killed by the very permanence and positive nature of the record, killed beyond all hope. To-day in spite of fond and imaginative mothers we do not wish to see second Pavlovas, we are interested in seeing new dancers who express their own minds and bodies and

consequently something of their own times, yes, even in the classic works of yesterday, for that alone can keep the classics alive. Pavlova as the echo of Grahn in *Giselle* could not have moved the world

The only practical use I can see for the film in ballet is as a purely legal proof of copyright. To be taken and then locked away till produced for the edification of judge and jury in one of those innumerable disputes that are a feature of Russian Ballet and by now almost a tradition in themselves.

It is another matter altogether with television, the showing of an actual thing at the moment it is happening.

The ballet was interested in the new medium as early as 1933, the old thirty line days, when looking for ten minutes and taking what one saw on faith resulted in little but an hour's sick headache. It was arranged then for a group of Colonel de Basil's young dancers to be televised. This was without any aesthetic significance but it showed that the dancer believed in the future of television. Since then the invention has made giant strides and I have watched ballet both in and out of the studio in the very capable hands of D. H. Munro and Stephen Thomas, both of whom understand the art. It is still in its infancy, but unless it is fought tooth and nail by a short-sighted entertainment industry it will make still more rapid advances in size, definition and available distance. Even if it is opposed, it will win and help the entertainment industry in spite of itself, just as broadcasting has undoubtedly done.

Its help to ballet lies in very many directions. It can popularise ballet just as the wireless has popularised concert music and variety, and more important still it can subsidise ballet, a corporation fulfilling the role of Louis XIV and the Empress Anne, just as the radio subsidises orchestras and concerts to-day. The fact that one is watching actuality is all important here, and not only from the purely psychological point of view. Added to this the camera can perform an endless variety of

“tricks”, and “tricks” is the wrong word. I have used it here so as to contradict it immediately and bring out my meaning. The “tricks” used in films which so astonished in *The Shape of Things to Come* and *The Invisible Man* have nothing to do with the flesh-and-blood performers, they are laboratory devised, altogether outside acting, but the effects produced by the television camera present a facet of what is actually occurring at the moment. They are as true, as if it were possible for the spectator to be in five places at once during the actual performance and select from which one he wished to watch at any given moment. The producer in the control room is in this position and selects from his five cameras the views that seem to him the most expressive, blending or melting one into the other as he sees fit. The difference is enormous. Although the most complicated mechanics are involved there is actually nothing mechanical intervening between the performance danced at that moment and the audience. The spectator merely becomes the richer by several pairs of eyes from which he can select. In the hands of the clever producer, and already in a very small way D. H. Munro and Stephen Thomas have performed wonders, this opens up endless possibilities from the straight showing of a ballet to something altogether fantastic but that is at the same time altogether true and actual. The only risk involved is that in the hands of the ingenious producer something that is entirely trivial may appear highly significant. I have seen this done and was amazed at the stupidity of the actual work when I saw it.

For the future of ballet, and let there be no doubt television will play a very great role, the producer like the choreographer must digest his Noverre and concentrate not on the easy pattern, but on the drama and humanity of the art. In the near future the choreographer will have to add still another attribute to the formidable list prepared by Noverre, a knowledge of the mysteries of the ether.

APPENDIX

Skating on Thin Ice, or Buddha in the Frigidaire

THE aesthetic of Noverre, Blasis and Fokine as apart from their pronouncements on technique pure applies to nearly every form of the theatre and to every form of movement considered as an art.

Had the producers of a skating entertainment *Rhapsody on Ice*, presented at Covent Garden Oct. 1937, taken the trouble to consult these authorities they would have found much that was practical and that would have enabled them to show a group of highly trained skaters to advantage instead of giving them a handicap that it was impossible to overcome. Never did the modernity and value of their writings appear more vividly and these skating "ballets" showed all the faults that the ballet proper has rid itself of these last twenty-five years.

The first drama was a romantic story, blend of *Lac des Cygnes*, *Hansel and Gretel* and all the rest. The convention was for the performers to be on skates. Up to a certain point well and good. Fokine postulates *an equal partnership between the arts composing ballet*. One of the main criticisms of the skaters was made on that very point. The music was so subservient that the *tempo* was allowed to be tortured to an altogether unbearable degree. It no longer had an existence of its own.

Noverre postulates *a relationship between movement and the action of the story*. In this romantic ballet a skater who excels

at the feat and purely because he excels at the feat jumps over several obstacles clumsily deposited by the *corps de ballet*. This is the very *divertissement* entrance in the ballet that Noverre fought against. It was an excellent "stunt" in itself and could have been used dramatically, but the drama it provided was something quite extraneous to the story and that depended on the fear that the skater would hurt himself and the relief when he came to a halt in safety.

The second ballet offended in more and in other respects. The scene was laid in India. Now the convention we have accepted up to a point is that the performers move on skates, but we have only accepted this up to a point. Both Noverre and Fokine *invoke a type of naturalism and insist that the action shall be plausible*. Ice under the burning tropical sun may be acceptable to some, but what is not is an Indian crowd in solid boots. Whatever the action that must appear ridiculous and the choice of scene was so extreme that there could be no two opinions. It was clearly a case of skating for the sake of skating—and excellent much of it was.

Movement also must fit the style of the work. It is quite impossible even to approximate oriental movement on skates. It is difficult enough in all conscience for the ballet dancer. The actual movement used, save for an occasional wriggle, did not attempt the impossible. The producers even treated us to an apache dance!

There are certain subjects that the skater must avoid, the East is one. Whatever the convention one could not tolerate a drama of the foreign legion on ice.

Ballet is limited as we have shown in what it can express, skating is perhaps more limited, but there is no reason at all why with its grace of movement it should not become a theatre art. It has its subjects, one can think of them easily; the Spirit of the North (or South) Pole, Xmas on the Ice à

la Dickens, complete with Pickwick and Winkle, the canals of Holland in the manner of *Breughel*. *Study literature and painting*, said Noverre. Had the producers not thought of all the stunts available and introduced them at random into a set story, but composed the story first this thing could have been an artistic success. Thirty years ago the Maryinsky *ballerinas* always inserted a popular Russian dance in the middle of any ballet wherever the scene of action. They too had forgotten Noverre with far less excuse.

That night at Covent Garden summarised the whole history of ballet, underlining its unfortunate periods and their causes as fortunately no ballet within recent memory has done. Ballet could go the same way, if it ever forgot its great masters.

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